THE POTTER'S WHEEL

By Ian Maclaren

With the love
of
Marion and John Meig

Xmas.
1897.

THE POTTER'S WHEEL

BOOKS BY JOHN WATSON, D.D.
(IAN MACLAREN.)

BESIDE THE BONNIE BRIER BUSH.
THE DAYS OF AULD LANG SYNE.
A DOCTOR OF THE OLD SCHOOL. With Illustrations by F. C. Gordon.
THE UPPER ROOM.
THE MIND OF THE MASTER.
KATE CARNEGIE. With Illustrations by F. C. Gordon.
THE CURE OF SOULS. Lectures on Preaching at Yale University, 1896.
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THE POTTERS WHEEL + BY IAN MACLAREN

(pseud.)

John Watson

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TO

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL

WHO CONSTRAINED ME

TO WRITE

CONTENTS

Ay, note that Potter's Wheel,
That metaphor, and feel
Why Time spins fast, why passive lies our clay. . . .
He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, would'st fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth sufficiently impressed.

The Potter's Wheel

CHAPTER I

THE POTTER'S WHEEL

It is inevitable that a serious person should some time or other be perplexed by the ordering of Providence and ask bitter questions. This may be the best of all possible worlds to people who do not think and have never felt. But to their neighbours it often seems unjustly and foolishly governed. Why should one man be handicapped by hereditary disease of body or a worse hereditary taint of soul, so that he has to fight against odds all his days, while another starts with a superb constitution and an accumulated capital of virtue? Why

should a man of dull and unimaginative nature be endowed with riches, so that he can be surrounded with beauty, while one on whom has been bestowed the gift of vision is imprisoned in a sordid environment? Why should one child be brought up among squalor and vice, so that meanness soaks into the pores of his soul, and another have every advantage of fair circumstances and religious training? Why should calamity of one kind or another hang over some families from year to year, while on others the sun seems ever to be shining? Why should evil have been allowed at all, and pain and dying? One were either blind or callous if he did not ask such questions, and wait anxiously for some kind of answer.

This answer will depend in the last issue on the person's religious

standpoint, but both faith and unbelief agree that we are in the hands of an Almighty Power. Some power there surely is which from age to age has been moulding the life of the Race and of each individual, unseen, mysterious, potent, against which we dash ourselves in vain. Unbelief can only call it Fate — a combination of social and physical laws which have no mind and no heart, which act blindly and unconsciously. Faith calls it God, a living, active, personal Being, Who forms and fulfils His purposes after the good pleasure of His will. According to the strenuous and austere habit of Jewish thought, whose first idea was the greatness of God, He is the Potter and we are the clay, and as for the innumerable and inexplicable circumstances of life, they are simply the whirling wheel on which the clay

is changed and shaped till the Potter's design is finally accomplished. This is the Bible philosophy of life.

This doctrine of Providence lays a good foundation for religion, and is an immense gain over unbelief. Perhaps one of the most awful and hopeless thoughts which can possess the human mind is that we are all caught in the moving wheels of a huge machine, which has no hand to control it, and goes on relentlessly of its own accord. It were terrible to be stretched on a rack whose cords were tightened at the command of an inquisitor; but it were ten thousand times worse if the mechanism was automatic and uncontrolled. Even an inquisitor hath flesh and blood, but this iron monster, to it there is no appeal, in it no pity: one may be discouraged and baffled by the ways of Providence,

but one knows that the Power which has us at its mercy can see and hear us, and is wise and righteous. If the wheel whirls with our poor lives upon it, there is a hand to check and guide it.

Perhaps the first lesson to be learned from the absolute government of God, is *submission*. We are apt to be contentious, rebellious, self-assertive, and insolent. We complain of ill-treatment in the world: we think we have an action against some one: we would sit in judgment on God Himself. This bitter and querulous state of mind is bad for our character, and hinders peace of life. It would be good for us Westerns, with our independence, irreverence, and restlessness, to be touched with the spirit whereby the Jew, and no less the Mohammedan, realised the sovereignty of God. God is great, and it is not for us to resist:

God knows all, and it is not for us to criticise. We are His creatures, and are at His disposal: we understand less of His plans than the dumb unreasoning animal under our roof does of ours. Has He sent good? Blessed be God. Does He send evil? Blessed be God. What else can we say? We are the clay and He is the Potter.

This faith yields a more gracious lesson, for it is charged with *comfort*. If God be to us as a potter with his clay, then no one's life can be the play of chance, but must be the result of design. As before the workman's mind the image of the vessel ever stands when as yet there is nothing but a handful of clay, so before the vision of God the soul of His creature appears complete and perfect, while to the man himself and others that soul is shapeless and unformed. Within the Divine mind

therefore lieth not only the idea of the whole universe, but also the idea of each individual, and as history slowly evolves from the mind of God so also does each life proceed from the same mind. Each man — both his soul and his life — is a calculated work of God, to whose completion the wisdom and power of God will be devoted. And we know the unchanging and eternal model before the Divine Worker's eye, and on which everything coming from His hand is shaped. The vessel may be large or small, it may be of finer or coarser stuff, but it is intended to be after the fashion of Jesus Christ. Amid the innumerable forms of imperfection, spoiled or in process, amid the confusion and the disasters of life, the excellent image of Christ remains as the type and end of our Race.

One also is filled with *hope* at the

figure of the clay, because it suggests the immense and unimagined possibilities of human nature. Upon first sight how poor a thing is this man, with his ignorances, prejudices, pettinesses, his envy, jealousy, evil temper. Upon second thoughts, how much may be in this man, how much he may achieve, how high he may attain. This dull and unattractive man must not be despised, whether he be yourself or another: he is incalculable and unfathomable. He is simply raw material, soul stuff, and one can no more anticipate him than you could foresee a Turner from the master's colours — some of them very strange — or a Persian rug from a heap of wool. Out of that unpromising face, that sleeping intellect, those awkward ways, this crust of selfishness and a hundred faults, is going to be made a man whom the world will admire and honour.

And one can now understand the function of those circumstances which perplex and try us. They are the rough, unsightly, but most skilful and adaptable machinery by which God changes a lump of clay into a vessel fit for the finest service. No instrument has ever created character, neither books nor influence of friends, like the play of life with God's Hand holding the vessel. A person standing by can see the obedient sentient material respond — taking its appointed proportions and gracious lines, here expanding, there retiring, here bearing the strokes which cut deep to create beauty, there being hardly pressed to remove roughness. Men had never been made in Eden, in ease, quietness, innocence: they come to their height in struggle, agonies, temptations, dangers, reverses. The descent of Moses from a prince to a

shepherd and his often thankless labours have given him the second place to Christ in the history of the world. Without his shameful sin and passion David had not written the fifty-first Psalm. Had St. Paul remained a contented Pharisee in Jerusalem instead of being persecuted through the Roman Empire we had not been reading his Epistles to-day. The lonely martyrdom of the Beloved Apostle cleansed the eyes of his soul and St. John saw the heavenly city. It is with rough and often cruel tools that the Potter achieves the likeness of Christ in a human soul.

Two conditions are required in the conscious human clay, with its wealth of emotion and power of choice. One is an understanding of the Divine purpose, which is our holiness. This world with its fiery temptations, its searching trials, its

awful mysteries, its passing illusions, its wholesome disappointments, its unsatisfying rewards, its subtle suggestions of the unseen, its sudden revelations of the spiritual, is the best of means for the creation of sainthood which is the free choice of God beyond all other treasures. What a wise and good world it has been for the soul we shall only know on the other side, when we have the after look and God's plan is accomplished. Here we are looking at the vessel in the rough, there we shall see it when the Potter has perfected the work of His hands.

And the other condition is that we love, for only in the atmosphere of love can the Divine operations have their full course and succeed. If we be distrustful and rebellious, ever suspecting and complaining of God, then not even His touch can

beautify our souls. We shall be as foolish headstrong children whom no wise and kindly chastisements can help, whom they only embitter and disfigure. He only is plastic material for the Potter, who is filled with amazement that God should think of him and with gratitude that God should take such trouble with him: who sees in every touch of gentle severity another proof of His patience, and who continually beseeches God not to cease until His Love be satisfied.

CHAPTER II

DEPARTURES IN LIFE

Perhaps Hebrew literature, with its unsuspected tendernesses and winsome simplicities, does not afford a more felicitous figure than the comparison of the changes God is pleased to send upon His children to an eagle stirring up the nest in which her young are resting. With instinctive wisdom the mother bird has chosen a ledge where the home can be built safe from intrusion and alarms; with laborious effort she shapes it stick by stick, padding the hardness with plumage from her own breast. The eaglets are brought forth in the fastness of the everlasting rocks; they are kept beneath the shelter of their mother's wings. Day by day she

goes forth into the unknown to get their food, and they open wide their mouths as she returns. While the young birds are still helpless, the eagle does everything for them: as they grow and their wings gather strength, she invites them to fly. It is natural that they should be afraid to launch into that awful depth with their untried pinions. While a nest remaineth they will never dare to fly, and therefore — so the story goes — the mother deliberately wrecks her own labour of love till it lies in ruins, and the fledglings have no shelter on the windy height. She then allures them into the air — making short flights by way of example, and safeguarding them beneath with her wings. Driven from their security and tempted into the blue, the young eagles make their great venture.

Very tenderly and very carefully does our Father prepare for His chil-

dren an environment in this life, that at no time we may be defenceless One nest after another is built out of many circumstances, all touched and softened by the Divine Love; from the beautiful world into which we are born, to the house that a hundred sacred associations have made home. We settle down in each nest with a sense of rest and finality, and have no wish to risk ourselves in the depths outside our little life. Left to ourselves we had never cherished any spiritual ambition; we had never wished to use our wings. But Providence, sometimes by rude shocks, sometimes by gentler compulsions, dislodges us from our place and casts us forth where we must fly or be dashed to pieces. The great changes of life are moments of supreme adventure, when we bid good-bye to the homes which, with a hundred familiar surroundings, bid us stay

and commit ourselves to the unknown, with its depths below and its heights above. Every new departure is an abandonment of security: it is an expedition into an unexplored and mysterious region. It is a venture of the soul.

Changes are one of the surest means for bracing and quickening character. Within the bounds of uneventful and secured circumstances, where from childhood to old age life flows evenly, smoothly, slowly, with no rapids, no pools, no rocks, a type of character is formed which is not without beauty. It is gentle, tender, thoughtful, but it cannot be strong. Where life has had its emergencies, its agonies, its surprises, its speculations, it has its highest possibilities. When men have put forth from the shore in search of a new world, when they have staked their all upon a new enter-

prise, when they have faced a revolution in life, they grow resolute and strenuous. It was his emigration from his father's house into an unknown country that brought Abraham to his height. The crisis in Moses' career was his surrender of princely luxury and his identification of himself with a horde of slaves. A handful of Jewish peasants have changed the face of the world, because there was in them the heart to answer the call of Jesus. No one can ever imagine what power may be lying unused and hidden till a man is driven off his ledge, where he has been fed and warmed, without fear and without thought. Do not judge him while he has only fluttered his wings at the coming of food; wait till he stretches them to go up to heaven. It is in the throes of a revolution a nation comes to birth: it is in the moment of change the soul awakes.

Among the various changes in ordinary life four are conspicuous, and the first comes when one leaves home for the first time, and makes his plunge into the world. It does not matter very much whether he is going to a public school or to business in a great city: he is beginning life on his own account. As the day draws near — a day no one can ever forget, when he passes out of the old homestead for the first time — there is a tumult in the heart. The unspeakable privileges of a good home — the daily oversight, the spoken advice, the kindly offices, the sense of protection, the warmth of love — suddenly arise before the memory and are appreciated to the full, just as they are about to be lost. The vague dangers of the new life, its strange faces, unaccustomed duties, lonely circumstances, unexpected temptations, possible hostilities,

powerfully affect the imagination and darken the future. The lad does his best to show a smiling face, for the sake of those whom he is leaving, and he recognises that this outgoing is inevitable, but there would be something wrong with him if his heart did not sink and his eyes were not dashed with tears at the turn of the road. These emigrations are very trying for those who go and those who stay, but both live to appreciate their purpose. Within a few years, and not without a few humiliations, the raw, unformed lad changes into a man, with a sense of responsibility, with serious views of life, with a knowledge of affairs, with brave plans of service. It had been a cruel kindness to save him from this experience: it is a happy condition of things after all that sends us forth from the best of Edens on our 'wander year.'

Another momentous change, and one whose effect on character is greatly overlooked, is marriage. It will ever remain a chief mystery of human experience, that at the sight of a face and the sound of a voice which yesterday were strange, or rather at the vision of a soul, and the sense of a pre-established harmony, a whole life will be turned upside down. A new-born passion, joyful, masterful, inspiring, seizes the nature, and in a day eclipses the affections of youth, and erases the plans of early manhood as if they had never been made, so that one could leave father and mother, could change even his country and his calling. No words can appraise the suddenness and sway of love, before which prudence and selfishness yield and vanish. It is natural that literature should give a solitary place to love among the motives of life; it is

amazing that ordinary people never seem to take love at its full value. Surely there can be no doubt that, excluding certain profound religious experiences given to few, love is the most irresistible force in the story of the individual, and marriage the most dominant event. For two human beings to enter into this unreserved and irrevocable relationship with its committal of body and soul, of joy and peace, of all life's labour and ideals, into one another's hands, is a supreme act of trust and a last risk. A divine instinct calls us, and is justified in the end. Some lives may be broken in this flight, or done to death in black chasms of suffering and shame, but for most marriage becomes a perfect discipline of character. Thoughtful and serious people come nearer still to the heart of things, and see the veil lifted from the mysteries of being. Careless

and frivolous people are solemnised by an immense responsibility and are deepened by an unselfish passion. No experience will teach the lesson of sacrifice so successfully, none invest it with such charm. The laws of life have many exceptions, and some choice souls have come into their full estate in solitude; but for most this daring experiment has been the crown of life.

The third change is more prosaic, and yet in its way very trying and very influential, and it is shifting one's home. After one has lived for some time in the same place, he acquires a feeling of permanence. He has grown into his house till it fits him like a shell; he has completed a circle of friends who among them afford all he needs; he has fitted the routine of the day to particular hours, to a certain road, to various expedients; he has a pew in church,

where alone he can enjoy a sermon; he has found a piece of work that is suited to his powers. Here he has lived, here he expects to live, and here he expects to die. In fact, he is in a nest, and one sees him every year snuggling down into its comfort with great content, when, perhaps without any warning, he is sent forth. Another environment, with a new house, new faces, new customs, a new church, is no light trial to any man above middle age. Why should Providence, which fitted up this home so mindfully not have left me in it till I changed into the house not made with hands? Very likely because the change will vivify and renew the soul, as a visit to foreign parts quickens the intellect, which has grown jaded and commonplace. A new voice may give a new evangel. Breaking up conventionalities may lay the mind open to fresh ideas. A vari-

ety of service may afford the opportunity for inspiration. The change may be into a wider place, where the wind of God blows as it listeth round the soul — nothing between.

Some changes can be avoided — whether for good or ill is another matter; but one awaiteth us all, when the whole circumstances of this life shall be shattered in a moment, and, willing or not willing, every one of us shall go forth into the unseen. This is the final venture of the soul, and a most tender Providence prepares us for it by many hints and warnings. A sharp illness, some failing of mind, a general decay, or the departure of a friend, are all a loosening of the nest and a command to be ready for flight. What an outgoing it is, over the brink, where we can see nothing below or above, where we can feel nothing under our feet! Is it cowardly for the average

person to tremble at this last emigration — this departure into an untried and vacant abyss? Yet let us not lose heart or be unfaithful. A great abyss it is, as if one should cast himself from the height of a precipice into the air. But it is not untried, for with every change from childhood an excursion has been attempted into the unknown. It was only a flutter on the edge, but still it proved that we had wings, and we came back to our resting-place unhurt and undismayed. This time we shall not return; our wings will have to serve us longer. And the abyss is not empty, for never have we gone out in any journey of the soul but God was with us, guiding us when we had no longer our earthly father, revealing Himself through the sacrament of human love, dwelling where we dwell, as with the pilgrim patriarchs. The hands

that curiously constructed this kindly nest are the same that will take it down. The wings which covered us in our callow childhood here will bear us up out yonder. The God who is here, is there and everywhere. The wide and open space is full of sunlight, and underneath our souls for ever shall be the everlasting arms.

CHAPTER III

BROKEN HOMES

THE providence of God never presses more sorely upon the heart, nor raises harder questions in the mind, than when His servant Death knocks at the door of some unconscious contented home, and summons an unlikely member across the threshold. We have no quarrel with the kindly office of the dark angel, and would not desire that he should delay his coming beyond the time, since many years without strength are only sorrow and humiliation. It is better that the ripe fruit should be plucked before it begins to decay upon the tree, and the golden corn reaped before it runs to waste. Nothing can

be more fitting and seemly than the departure of one whose work has been well finished, and who has reached the evening of his day. What appears utter unreason and cruelty — a mere caprice or blunder of Providence — is the removal of the head of a family in the midst of his days, or a house-mother whose deserted children follow her to the door, or a young child in the fresh promise of spring. Is not this the wilful wrecking of love's long labour? For a home is a beautiful work which is slowly created; it is a perfect unity whose injury cannot be repaired. Why should two people be moved of the Divine Spirit to love, only to be separated after a few years? Why should children be given only to be taken? Why should a home be enriched with a wealth of tender associations, and in a little while the inhabitants sit lonely in its desola-

tion, listening for a footstep that will never be heard on the stair again, wearying for a voice that is still?

When a person in such straits is concerned about the goodness of God, his anxious questions are not to be condemned as a sign of unbelief, but are rather to be welcomed as a fruit of faith. If one does not believe in his heart that there is any God, or at least quite despairs of knowing Him, then he is not likely to vex himself about the divine character. No circumstances can either make God better or worse, any more than if He were an idea in a book. If, however, one has learned to put all his trust in God, and God has become the portion of his soul, then he cannot help being very jealous about His honour. Any act which suggests carelessness or cruelty on the part of God is an unspeakable and irre-

deemable calamity. Leave God untouched in His wisdom and love, and the pious soul can bear many afflictions, for at the worst it can hide itself in Him, Who is the soul's refuge and help in time of trouble. Without God — and if God be unworthy of trust there is no God — tribulation is another name for destruction. The vindication of God is the first thought of faith in face of trial, and we are never inclined to judge our Father more harshly than when standing amid the ruins of a home.

Before trying to find reasons for the divine action, it is always well to remind ourselves how little we know about anything, and how very unlikely it is that we shall know much more till we get the after look. We are the victims of the present and the imperfect, seeing only processes, not ends, understanding only a part, not the whole. We should

never have imagined this fair earth, had it been given us to see fire and water labouring like blind and chaotic forces at its making, and it is at least as impossible to anticipate what gracious products of human character may result from what seems in our day the confused and senseless agonies of life. What we are alone able to see is the carving of the stone, with the dust and broken splinters, the wrong side of the web, with its tangle of threads, the molten metal poured from crucible to crucible. Each generation lives amid the machinery which is making souls, and the individual must be patient when he fails to understand its whirling wheels and sharp-edged tools. The past with its golden record of conspicuous successes corrects our hasty judgments; the future with its incalculable possibilities bids us hope. When the day is over and

the work is done it will be soon enough to judge the government of the Eternal.

Meanwhile one must be very unobservant of life and very unintelligent about its meaning if he cannot see some spiritual ends and some kindly alleviations even in these sudden and crushing blows that shatter happy homes. It does certainly seem wanton to call away a father who is not only the bread-winner but also the councillor of a family, at the very time when his example and influence will mostly tell; or a mother while her children are still young and chiefly need her sympathy, her care, her love. The loss is so irreparable that we do not reckon the compensations. Is there any relation so fond on the one side, so chivalrous on the other, as that between a widowed mother and her loyal sons? Can there be found any one more

thoughtful, more protecting, more tender-hearted than a man who has to be both father and mother to his children? If marriage be the normal state for the vast majority of men and women, its sad eclipse has often called into exercise the most gentle and winsome virtues, has afforded the opportunity for the most affectionate and thoughtful services.

When one comes to the loss of young children — a sad perplexity — let it not be forgotten that they were given. If in the hour of bitterest grief it were asked of a bereaved mother whether she would prefer never to have possessed in order that she might never have lost — her heart would be very indignant. No little child has ever come from God and stayed a brief while in some human home — to return again to the Father — without making glad that home and leaving behind some trace

of heaven. A family had counted themselves poorer without those quaint sayings, those cunning caresses, that soft touch, that sudden smile. This short visit was not an incident: it was a benediction. The child departs, the remembrances, the influence, the associations remain. If one should allow us to have Sarto's Annunciation for a month, we would thank him: when he resumed it for his home he would not take everything, for its loveliness of maid and angel is now ours for ever. And if God recalls the child He lent, then let us thank Him for the loan, and consider that what made that child the messenger of God — its purity, modesty, trustfulness, gladness — has passed into our soul.

Is it not the case also in many instances that death has been a merciful escape for children grievously

smitten in body or mind? No child calls forth so much tender solicitude, none is so fondly loved, as one afflicted; none is held more firmly, for none are more prayers offered. If it lay in the will of the parents they would never consent to its removal, so wonderfully do helplessness and suffering appeal to the heart. With a just parent there is only one ground of partiality — weakness; only one child that has more than its share of love — the invalid. Yet is it not an unconscious and cruel selfishness of love that would wish for that child a prolonged hospital life? Is it not a merciful release when the prisoner escapes from the bondage of this body, and enters on the fulness of life, where there is no more pain?

There are worse evils than pain of body, from which death gives immunity; and no one can look at the

innocent face of a little child that has fallen on sleep without thanking God for victory before the battle. One at least of God's children has been spared the risk of temptation, the bitterness of defeat, the sore struggle after perfection. What an uncertainty is the life before an infant in its mother's arms! What sin and shame may be its experience ere all be over! Has no father ever declared, with a heart broken by some Absalom, 'Would that he had died in his childhood?' Is it not good that some of our race should have but one chapter in their short lives here, and is it to be desired that all should have page upon page that none but God must see, that nothing but Christ's blood can cleanse?

Death must always be a dreaded visitor to any house, and it is hard to forgive his robberies, but he

leaves behind many peaceable fruits. For instance, a certain seriousness of thought and feeling that are not easily learned. People who are strong and busy and successful and glad — who have never been chastened in their hearts — are apt to take shallow and trifling views of life. They do not see clearly because of the glare of sunshine in the room, so that they might pass a Crucifixion without notice. Life is but a pleasant day — a pastoral, with song and dancing. By and by one blind after another is drawn down, till the light grows grey and sombre, and the Christ upon His Cross looks out from the shadow. The deeps of life are opened with their solemnities, their realities, their tragedies. The character loses its light grace, its gay delight in the comedy of existence; but it gains instead an understanding of the inwardness of

things and the responsibilities of the soul.

Family bereavement also works a singular and beautiful gentleness that can be detected almost without fail in the expression of the eye — in the tone of the voice. Some of the best wine is harsh and unpalatable till it goes a long sea voyage. After it has been tossed on the high seas and gone round the Cape, it becomes mellow and soft. There are strong natures which were once intolerable; they were so self-confident, so masterful, so inhuman. But Death visited their house, and they came forth from his school other men, and now the strength is touched with sympathy and humility. Such men become the saviours of the world with Christ, for it is doubtful whether any man has ever helped his fellows in the high affairs of life who has not tasted sorrow.

And Death is a very successful teacher of that faith we all long to possess; the conviction of the Unseen. We may play with the arguments against another life when our affections are neutral, and may even pretend that the case is not proven. Let one of our flesh and blood bid us good-bye and pass within the veil, and reason surrenders the place to love. A young child with Christ does more to illuminate the other world than all the books that ever have been written, and it has often come to pass that at the touch of this unseen hand hard and sceptical men have arisen and set their faces towards God, for the hope of seeing again a golden head on which the sun was ever shining.

CHAPTER IV

LOSS OF GOODS

With most people — annuitants and Government pensioners are perhaps the only exceptions — an unexpected reverse in circumstances must be taken into account as one of the possible incidents of life; and it is harder to bear than the victim is inclined to confess, or than his neighbours ever suspect. A brave man shows a good face for the time, and makes light of the blow — it is, he declares, but the fortune of war. Friends surround him with assurances of sympathy — it is, they suggest, only a disguised success. Both sides make an admirable rally, and give one a better idea of human nature;

but such backsets are not joyful but grievous. When a professional man has given his best brains to his work and is ungratefully treated, or a clerk has slaved for a firm and is dismissed for the sake of petty economy, or a servant has put the family's interests before her own and is made an offender for a word, or a merchant accumulates a competency and sees it scattered by some speculator, it does seem as if the times were out of joint, and the heart of the sufferer is apt to grow bitter. What reward has principle, faithfulness, industry, loyalty? Is there no intelligible law in the moral world, but only a whimsical Providence which changes a man's wheat into tares, between the seed-time and harvest?

Loss of goods is a very fair illustration of this kind of trial, and is treated too lightly by persons who have not lost any or never had any

to lose. There are, of course, distinctions between cases, and sympathy is sometimes out of place. If one has lost a fraction of the fortune he does not know what to do with, and is only anxious to increase, then it is not uncharitable to refuse him pity, or cruel to congratulate him on a wholesome bloodletting. Fewer goods may mean less care for him, less worldliness for his wife, happier because truer marriages for his daughters, more strenuous lives for his sons, a higher level of life for the whole family. But if a man be cast down because yesterday he was rich and to-day he is poor, one who has a wife and children, then let no person despise or belittle him as selfish, or mercenary, or worldly, or unspiritual. You are not entitled to judge him unless you have either made a sacrifice of your possessions for some great cause, or have taken joyfully

the spoiling of your goods; and if you have passed through such experiences they will have taught you charity. No man need be thought an unworthy Christian because a worldly reverse adds ten years to his age or writes its mark on his brow.

Various reasons may be imagined for his concern besides disappointed avarice, and one may be a sense of injustice. The activity of life is largely based on the law of work and its reward. It is a perfectly honest instinct which resents the idea of labouring a long day and getting no wages in the evening. This is not a question of selfishness at all, it is a question of righteousness. The one who has been refused his right is injured, the one who wronged him is a rascal. If there be any manhood in the worker he will insist on his wage although he give it away next

minute, and if he fail to get it the Bible will express his indignation with power. Suppose he accumulates a sum from his earnings as a support in old age or a provision for his family, and he be robbed of it by the strong hand of a merciless firm, or the reckless operations of an unscrupulous speculator, or the rascality of a gang of public swindlers, or the deliberate deceit of a trusted friend, then he has been spoiled of his just possessions, and he does well to be angry. When an industrious and well-doing man is plundered without redress it will be a marvel if he be not bitter.

Loss of wealth may also be regretted because wealth was the means of securing pure and ennobling pleasures. Money has a different value with different men, and is indeed a symbol for what we chiefly love or need. With some it may mean meat

and drink and clothing and luxuries, which things come to sloth, pride, and extravagance. With others it signifies so many books written by the prophets of the Eternal, so many pictures by the interpreters of the Unseen. With certain others money is the instrument of goodness by which they relieve men in straits, provide for widows left comfortless, educate poor boys of intelligence, and bring some brightness into the lives of poor people. Money is neither culture nor charity — it may be the enemy of both; but it can create an atmosphere in which mind and heart will come to their flower. Any man is to be envied who can feed the purest tastes and obey the kindliest instincts as he pleases, to whom no treasure in vellum is forbidden, no generous succour of the needy is impossible; and if one is exiled suddenly from this goodly Eden,

then he is to be pitied and has cause of complaint.

It would be an injustice, however, to conclude that a true man will ever be much cast down by straitened circumstances if he be alone in the world. He is perfectly aware that any one, sane in soul, mind, and body, can always earn his living, and that a touch of hardness will only brace his soul. But he is perpetually concerned about the future comfort of those whom he loves and who have trusted him. Money-making has two sides: one is very ignoble, where an immortal being toils and scrapes and grasps and hoards, simply that he may possess: one is entirely noble, where one strives that he may provide. What heroism may be hidden behind buying and selling, bargaining and speculating! Where a weary, anxious man is ever thinking of a woman who must not know

want, of boys who must have their chance in life, one forgives him his carefulness, his keenness, his rashness, since all he does is for love's sake; and one understands that his suffering through a reverse has not in it a single grain of selfishness.

This man is, however, fortunate in retaining one possession, for loss of goods is not loss of honour. He may have to go into a smaller house, to practise various economies, to withdraw certain subscriptions, to refuse his family some pleasures; but he does not need to lower his head at the meeting of a friend. Nor will his children have cause to be ashamed of their father's name. There are men on whom the sun has shone, and who are increased in goods, yet none respect them. Most honest souls despise them. Their fortunes would be a cheap price for this man's character, but that cannot

be bought by gold, nor is it lost when gold departs. After all, it is not required of every one to be successful either in his business or in his profession — in letters or the Church. What is asked, and eternally shall be asked, is that a man shall obey his conscience, and do his duty by God and his neighbour. Has he done so according to his ability? Then, be his lot prosperity or adversity, let him keep a high heart, for none can put him to shame, either in this world or the next.

Adversity will also be helpless to deprive him of the love of wife or child, but by a blessed law of human hearts will only make him dearer. Does a woman think less of her husband because he has been worsted in the battle, and has been sent out of the lists wounded? She is so fashioned by God that she will claim her

knight before the people and glory in him, and lavish hitherto unknown riches of love on him, and be prouder of him than if he had come off victor over all opponents. Why? For a woman's reason: because he is not strong and successful; because he has failed, and therefore has need of sympathy and comfort and confidence. For another woman's reason: because he failed for her, so that every wound has become an evidence of his devotion, a claim on her loyalty. What a love is that which God hath placed in the heart of a woman — so magnanimous, so ungrudging, so forgiving, so steadfast! Is there any man living who has ever fathomed that love, who has ever lived so as to deserve it? Who shall ever be able to repay it? Dare a man complain of any loss who knows that he has the love of a good woman as his portion?

Besides, adversity is a searching test of friendship — dividing the sheep from the goats with unerring accuracy, and this is a good service. Times there are when it seems we cannot count the number of our friends — we see so many smiling faces, we hear so many pleasant words. Times there are when we are not certain and question our heart. Suppose one became unpopular or held unworldly opinions, or were reduced to poverty, or were slandered; how many of this agreeable crowd would come out and take their places by his side against the wall? We ought not to expect many. We may well be satisfied with six; and the one good of adversity is, that we should discover for certain who the six are. It might almost be worth enduring some loss to know how much uncalculating and unhesitating loyalty burns in

some silent, faithful, unflinching folk.

But among all the services of adversity surely the best is this, that it teaches us at last the difference between the goods that are held in barns and those that are stored in the soul. So alluring are the things which are seen, that they fascinate our minds and lead them captive; so severe are the things which are unseen, that they fail to seize our imagination and inspire our lives. We are blinded by the gaudy colours and tinsel glory of the material, so that the kingdom of God cannot compete for our love. What advantages have the intangible riches of the spiritual world that we should win them at a sacrifice? Adversity gives one answer — they last. Vision, knowledge, faith, love, holiness, cannot be taken from one by a thief; they cannot be lost in a day; they

cannot ooze away before his eyes. They are inalienable, and are never dearer, surer, sweeter, than when all other possessions have failed and disappeared. Does it not too often happen that as people rise in the social scale, their character deteriorates? They cast off old friends; they lose their former simplicity of manners; they withdraw from the service of Christ. They become affected, hollow, ambitious before our eyes. It is a law, with many a splendid exception, that those who are rich are deaf to the voice of Christ, and refuse His cross; that those who are poor give Him ready welcome and accept His cross as the way of life everlasting.

CHAPTER V

TRIALS OF FAITH

PERSONS familiar with the Vatican will remember the little chapel of Nicholas V., which opens out of the Constantine chamber, and is a welcome refuge from the crowd of curious sightseers. Beyond quietness and the chastened light, its attraction is some of the finest work of Fra Angelico, which he must have done on his last visit to Rome, and not long before his death. He once described himself as a monk who painted for the love of God, and he was so lifted above this world that he refused the See of Florence. It strikes one that Angelico was indeed very meet for the Heavenly King-

dom when he made the walls of Pope Nicholas' Chapel beautiful with the life of St. Stephen; and there was a fitness that his body should have been laid to rest in that church, S. Maria Sopra Minerva, whose name is a parable of the triumph of faith over learning. You cannot look on the face of the first Christian martyr without realising a soul separate from the strife of this present world and full of the peace of God. There is not a shadow of doubt or of questioning on the countenances of Angelico's saints. They are a picture of the age of faith.

Very different is the vast picture on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel which was one of Michael Angelo's most elaborate efforts, and has an awful fascination for one's mind. The subject is the 'Last Judgment,' and plunges you at once into another world from that in which Angelico

lived and prayed and wrought. The scene is crowded with figures contending together in mortal conflict, or striving to make a vain ascent from hell. Devils seize the saints and attempt to pull them down, while angels come to their help. Above sits Christ in His majesty, beneath are the open horrors of hell. The dark and gloomy colours of the background are made more ghastly by the white of unclothed bodies. Very slowly can you trace the details of the confused drama, very hardly can you discover the painter's idea. It is a work of agony and mystery, the reflection of a mind wrestling with the problem of life and history, of man and God. The simplicity of faith has departed and with it the serenity of the soul. Michael Angelo's strenuous and forceful work belongs to the age of doubt.

The parallel between the experi-

ence of the race and the individual is very complete, for he also has his age of faith, when it does not occur to him to question, and it is natural for him to believe. Across the troubled seas of manhood one looks back with wistful regret to the inland waters of childhood in whose calm clear surface were reflected the great mountains of God. We stand again by our mother's knee, and in a picture-book, with linen pages, see St. Peter drawing his net full of fishes, and look up on a starry night to the place where heaven is, and try to keep awake till Santa Claus comes with his gifts. It is the age of wonder when the world is peopled with fairies, and our life with miracles; when every spoken word is true, and every prayer is to be answered at once. God is good — if possible, better than our mother. Jesus is by our side, and the Holy Angels. Our

sins are giants to be fought. We plan achievements in the days to come. Like plants that are protected from the storm, we are learning to believe before the storm of doubt bursts on us in the open, and our heads are beaten for a little to the ground.

Certain favoured people are planted out by God's hand in such sheltered corners of His garden that the wind sweeping over the waste of moorland never touches them, and the sun from all the quarters is ever blessing them. With every year they know God better and are more firmly persuaded of His love. Jesus' presence is more distinctly felt, and the print of His feet grows clearer on the ways of life. For them the miraculous has no difficulties, since they have seen greater works than those in their own experience, and the mysteries of faith are the subject of their joyful meditation. Cross providences do not

disturb their hearts, being only the signs of a Father's love, and great sacrifices do not daunt them, being only the opportunity for a new surrender to the Divine Will. They are the pure in heart who see God; they are the meek who inherit the earth — who carry with them an atmosphere of calm, in whose eyes Heaven can be seen. They come down swiftly from the sunlit hill of youth like Angelico from Fiesole, and the ordinary affairs of life are illuminated for them, as the bare cells of San Marco glowed with his frescoes. They keep the child heart to the end unspoiled by the world, unvexed by doubts, in whose beautiful lives Christ is wonderfully commended.

'Who but a Christian through all life
That blessing may prolong?
Who, through the world's sad day of strife,
Still chant his morning song?'

It is the will of our Father to deal after another fashion with many of His children, who may turn out to be the strongest of the family in the day of their full manhood. Like their Elder Brother they are carried away into the wilderness and are tempted, some for long seasons, some for short, some once only, some at intervals all their life. One has no measure of comparison for the trials of life, but for souls of delicate temper none can be more fiery than the trying of faith. For it is faith which reinforces us in the sore straits of life, and ministers to us our chief consolations. It assures us of the love of God, of the life beyond the grave, of the victory over this present world, of the crown that shall be given to the soul; with the spell of faith so many afflictions are made light, so many are made acceptable; heaven opens above our head, this life is

shot through with light. It matters little how rough be the road so long as it stretches before us with some home at its end, or how keen be the wind if the sun be shining. When the track is lost on the hill and the night falls, then one may be excused if his heart fails also, and he is for a space tempted to despair.

Various circumstances put faith on her trial, and one of the most common is the shattering of a hereditary creed. Very few people indeed begin their religious life with an open mind, going out each one to find the new world for himself; and possessing it in his own right. He rather succeeds to an estate which some ancestor has won and bequeathed to following generations. Our opinions both in religion and politics are largely an entail, so that we believe as our fathers believed with considerable comfort and assur-

ance. If no one attacks this creed we may be left in possession all our days and be spared many perplexing questions. But it is well to remember that the title to a hereditary creed is very precarious and that our security may be roughly shaken. A single sentence in a strange book has roused the critical faculty and left the soul without a spiritual roof above its head. When suspicion is once aroused there is no honest or safe escape from the trial. One must go to the bottom of the matter: one cannot rest till he has verified his creed. It is the most anxious work to which a man can put his hand, but it has only to be done once and what remains is his own for ever.

Another trial of faith is rather physical than spiritual, but is not to be despised on that account. Quite suddenly bright and courageous per-

sons fall into gloom and sadness of heart from which they can hardly be raised. They are haunted by presentiments of calamity, they are assailed by evil thoughts, they consider themselves forsaken of God, they despair of goodness. Very likely the cause is physical, and the first medicine ought to be that given to the prophet Elijah by the angel. But the pain is of the soul and must be assuaged by spiritual remedies. The best of them all is to forget one's self and to think of God. Looking within only depresses, looking out is sure to cheer. The strenuous effort to escape from self and rest in God reacts with tonic effect on the soul, bracing and restoring its lost energies, filling it with peace and joy.

A third trial of faith comes from the wilful treachery of a friend in whom we have trusted, and this one cuts to the quick. No argument

against Christianity, no failure of the body, is so apt to blast our faith in God and men as the kiss of Judas Iscariot. It is a bitter experience and seems to sweep away all our sweet illusions — leaving us without a friend to rely upon, or a hope to cherish. Life is poisoned through all its veins and breeds suspicion, revenge, uncharitableness. Nothing can save us in such circumstances from cynicism and scepticism, except a supreme rally of charity which shall recall the immense goodness that we have all seen and tasted, which shall cast out the remembrance of Judas with the love of John.

The trials of faith are innumerable, but their effect ought to be one to clarify, strengthen, and settle. Surely it is good to learn that the object of faith is not the Bible, nor creeds, nor ourselves, nor our neigh-

bours, but God Himself and Jesus His Son. It is not the Bible which proves Jesus, but Jesus that proves the Bible. If dogmas have often been unreasonable, Jesus Himself has commended Himself to every man's mind. Our feelings may run up or down, God's love remaineth. Men may fall beneath themselves, God is true. When faith is gathered in and concentrated on the Eternal, it cannot be shaken. With every day's fellowship, every day's obedience, every day's knowledge, it strikes its roots deeper in God. It is excellent to say, 'God of our fathers,' and to have one's piety linked to the past, but it is best to say 'my God,' and to possess a faith that is unassailable, because it has been won by our own hand and is part of our own soul.

CHAPTER VI

MISSING THE PRIZE OF LIFE

NEVER is one so utterly overcome by the leaden weight of monotony as in a street of the middle class. The West-end of society stimulates the imagination by its suggestion of historical names, of art treasures, of cultured luxury. The East-end horrifies the imagination by its suggestion of sanctioned crime, of fierce deeds, of sheer barbarism. One cannot see either the Borghese Palace or a Bedouin's tent without a relief from the ordinary, and a reinforcement of romance. But to run the gauntlet of a hundred houses, where each one is the exact reproduction of all the rest, with so many win-

dows on the first floor, so many on the second; with a door of the same height, shape, appearance, and with the very curtains all woven from the same pattern, is a weariness of the soul. What a wilderness of the commonplace; what a miracle of sameness! Certainly, as seen from the street; but open a door and enter. In fifty-seven a young mother is holding her first-born child; in forty-two a father is bidding his children farewell before he takes the great journey; in thirty-one a son is telling his mother of his first success. Those are events charged with the joy and sorrow of life, chapters in the one lasting romance. Within the smooth unrelieved face of brick goes on the tragedy and victory of being, as surely as in the ancient time, and all the things are happening of which poets sing.

Sometimes it also appears as if

the mass of people one meets were commonplace and uninteresting to the last extreme. They dress after the same fashion, they say the same things, they have the same tricks of manner; they are the slaves of the same conventions. If some one would only break away from this conformity, if he would only strike out for himself, what a colour he would give to society; what a tonic he would be to jaded minds! Have those men and women no dreams, no visions, no passions, no commotions in their placid, self-contained, orderly lives? So in our moods of weariness we fret and complain of our neighbours. Why are we not more understanding and sympathetic? Have we had no experiences which we do not hand round for inspection, which we lock up in our hearts? Perhaps our neighbour has his secrets too, and wears the

thicker mask the more he dreads detection. Once he winced when conversation touched a certain kind of family sorrow; once his laugh was a little forced concerning one of life's comedies; neither husband nor wife joined in your condemnation of that social sinner. You mean? — nothing, except that every one likes to have some kind of screen between him and the passers-by. You know? — nothing, absolutely nothing, except that every life has had its incidents.

It has been said that each one of us could write one romance out of his own experiences, and if that be true, the subject would be love. Concerning this passion no self-respecting person will say much, and he that has felt its tides at their fullest will say least; but beyond question it remains the most irresistible and effectual in human experiences.

In the second part of the Holy Scripture it is hardly touched upon, because the New Testament is the history of a cause; in the former part it meets us everywhere, from the idyll of Jacob and Rachel to the lamentable tragedy of Hosea, because the Old Testament is the story of human lives. The glory of pure love is sung in the Canticles; the pollution of unchaste desire is declared in Proverbs. The romance of Isaac meeting Rebecca in the eventide, and being her true husband till death, is an eternal contrast to David's wandering passions and loathly degradation. Outside the Bible creative literature dealing with many motives has ever returned to love, and lavished its art on the analysis of this supreme passion, which, if bound with many cords, will yet tear itself free, and being outraged, will in the end pull

down the very pillars of a human life.

It may not be possible so to appraise the gains of life as to array them on a scale from highest to lowest, giving to culture, happiness, wealth, power, honour, each its own fixed place, since what is fascinating to one man is indifferent to his neighbour. No one in his senses can doubt, however, that love is the chief possession within our imagination, and that its power has not failed. For its sake a man has agonised and striven with the world and his soul; for its sake a woman has welcomed hardship and isolation, and both were right. Browning never struck a deeper and truer note than the divinity and sovereignty of love, on which he constructs some of his most captivating poems. As where the middle-aged man mourns over the body of 'Evelyn Hope,'

whom he loved, but 'it was not her time to love'; whom he expects one day 'will wake and remember and understand.' As in *Too Late*, where the lover holds his peace too long, and sees his beloved give herself to another, but after her death is consoled with the thought that in eternity she will be his. As in the *Summum Bonum*, which Browning wrote in old age, when he is thinking of his poetess wife, and wherein he declares

> 'Truth, that 's brighter than gem,
> Trust, that 's purer than pearl.
> Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe all were for me
> In the kiss of one girl.'

Browning's moral — and many will agree with him — is that love is the prize of life, and that he only has succeeded who has won it.

Some account must, however, be

taken of those who, having had their chance, have deliberately and finally put love aside. No one except their dear Lord and only Bridegroom can reckon the devoted souls which in all ages have denied themselves to human love that they might the better follow Christ whithersoever He goeth. And no one can be quite insensible to the tender purity and spiritual delicacy of certain saintly faces which have been touched by the passion for Christ. Nor must it be supposed that this is only a cloistered piety, or that it can only be found within convent walls. Most of us know persons who have come under vow to their own souls and have taken the solitary road, not that they might attain to special degree of sanctity, but that they might render some life service. So brothers for sisters, so sisters for brothers, so children for parents have strength-

ened their hearts and remained unwed. Sometimes their sacrifice — the last that can be offered — has been detected and rewarded by a gratitude that ought to know no limits. Sometimes it may be unsuspected and receive no return but peevish reproaches. God's guerdon, at least, does not tarry, for His hand has already placed the aureole on those modest, unconscious heads, and filled with fragrance those lives of uncomplaining, unboasting love.

Certain persons have also come to a place where they had the choice of tearing an unworthy love from their lives or dishonouring their souls. Their love had been belittled, or betrayed, or it had been flung aside as a common thing, or it had been dragged in the mire. It had been soiled and they would no longer give it heart-room, so they burned it saying nothing to any one, but such will

carry the marks of the fire till they die. Of these Tennyson was thinking in the *Holy Grail*, when he described:

'— such a fervent flame of human love
Which being rudely blunted, glanced and shot
Only to holy things; to prayer and praise,
She gave herself, to fast and alms.'

This is the transformation of love which, having been sent to the stake for conscience' sake, obtains the martyr's ruby crown.

Within this life the most pitiable of all tragedies, and the most helpless, is a loveless marriage. Just as marriage approaches the estate of heaven for a man and a woman whose souls are one in faith and hope, so a marriage approaches the estate of hell for two persons who have no community of thought or faith. Where, for instance, a man of bright intelligence is tied to a

coarse woman, or a spiritual woman united to an evil-living man, it is not wonderful that husband and wife should drift apart, and in the end come to hate one another. One can understand why some speak bitterly of life and rail against marriage. Others show a nobler courage in such a case, who hide their sorrow from the world and carry their heavy cross without speech, fulfilling the will of God with a proud patience, and having the nearer support of His favour till the kindly hand of death break the yoke.

After the victims of this cross-Providence — but at a long distance — are those who have loved and never been loved. It is surely a very hard lot to be dowered with a wealth of love and find none to receive it. We pity him who takes out a bundle of faded letters and reads them with vain regret, but he is far more to

be pitied who has no token because there has been for him no lover. Ah, the silent sorrow of lonely hearts which have never tasted life's cup of joy! Yet how evident and beneficent their mission in the world, how surely they have fulfilled it! There may be unmarried people who are sour and repellent. If so, bear with them who have sustained a severer loss than friends or goods. But they are not typical of that class, who have the warmest hearts in all the world, who are the chosen refuge of every needy unfortunate, from boys in scrapes and poor people in need to men and women with some secret sorrow to tell into a sympathetic ear. Their love has not been centred on one, so it embraces a hundred; their interest has not been narrowed to a single home, so it ranges through a city; no lover has monopolised their devotion, so it is

poured on the body of Christ. The alabaster box that had been laid aside for a great occasion has been broken, and the house is filled with the odour of the ointment.

CHAPTER VII

VEXATIOUS CHILDREN

PARENTS at times make a pretty pretence of indifference, but they are all aware that their satisfaction in life is bound up with the well-doing of their children. No man will grudge any labour or privation to secure for his son those advantages of culture which circumstances denied to himself: no woman will ever calculate her service to some delicate child that he may grow into strength. They will only taste regret if that lad fling away his chances, if that invalid live only to suffer. Do not envy any one who has achieved material success and has sons playing the fool; be sure he would give his fortune to see

them earning their bread after a self-respecting fashion. Do not waste your pity on any one because he has only a poor capital in money, if his son has taken his degree with honour at the University, or has won a name for integrity on the Exchange; this man is rich with treasures which no thief can steal, and, as is becoming, that son's father carries a high head. Did you ever grow weary while a mother sang the praises of a well-deserving son? Were you ever so far left to yourself as to sneer at her fondness? Then you sinned against one of the purest and tenderest of human emotions — the joy of a mother over her child. You had been a person to smile at the Virgin Mother herself who could not altogether hide from witnesses her delight in the Holy Child; to belittle God Himself, Who, according to the beautiful story in the Gospel, was so

moved by the life of Jesus, that He spake from an open heaven and said, 'My beloved Son.' The pride which a child has in his parents is excellent, something to be for ever cherished and approved. But the pride which parents feel in a good and faithful son is one of the most affecting and sanctifying spectacles in human life.

One would like to get the ear of children and suggest to them how much their parents' life — which means peace, hope, faith, and joy — depends on their conduct, in speech and deed, in manner and bearing. If young people could only put themselves in their parents' place and imagine, wonderful things would follow. Some idler, who will not work from motives of fear or respect or ambition, might be spurred by love, if only to save his mother from reproach. Some thoughtless, selfish girl might deny herself whims and

pleasures to bring satisfaction to the hearts of her people. Some young man might bear himself with a little more humility, and even condescend to give occasional information about his movements, if he had any idea of his father's feelings on certain occasions. Parents are kept at a distance, are denied proper confidence, have their convictions, wishes, tastes, — if you please foibles, — disregarded, look in vain for signs of affection and gratitude, have their just pride in their children wounded, not because the children are bad or cruel, but only because it does not occur to them that, although they consider themselves independent of the old folks, the old folks are continually, willingly, pathetically dependent on them for what is more than living, or rather what is the heart of all living — for love.

Parents ought, however, to be

sensible, reminding themselves that youth is a stage in life calling for much patience and tolerance. It may rather be taken as a process in the creation of character during which the wine is apt to be frothy and unpalatable. Persons about twenty — up or down — are often intoxicated with the first draught of life, and are neither what they were nor what they will be. They are hasty in their judgments, positive in their opinions, worshippers of idols, impatient of restraint, ashamed of old-fashioned ways, raised above the domestic affections, and wiser than all the ancients. They will threaten to leave home to become writers, artists, teachers, or something not defined, only misty and grand. Their political, social, and religious views may be amazing. This mightiness ought not, however, to be taken too seriously or made a

cause of quarrel between parents and children. This is sowing wild oats after a harmless fashion, and the wilful sower may be allowed some freedom without fear. His heart is sound, although his head be — for the moment — turned, and in a year or two he will laugh at himself openly. Do not let us call it vice, and lie awake of nights because our children, like other young animals, champ the bit and toss their heads and threaten to run away, when they are first harnessed to the duties of life.

With years will come understanding and self-restraint: with years will reappear the homely duties and simple ways which were for a little despised, and forty-nine out of fifty will settle down to honest work and filial piety. It may not be so with the fiftieth, and there shall be the heartbreak. In his ill-omened life

the gaiety and irresponsibility of youth deepen into insolence, idleness, viciousness, and utter shamelessness. For a time his faults are excused; then they are covered; at last they are flagrant, so that the world knows what has befallen this home. Somewhere in a distant colony a son is living as in the far country, carrying beneath his degradation the traces of culture and religion. No acquaintance speaks of him to his people; his name is never mentioned in the home; all traces of him are removed; his mother alone pities and prays for him. His history is written, for those who can read, in his mother's face, in his father's humiliation. This is the secret chapter in many a family history; this is the black sorrow in many an English home, beside which worldly losses and bereavement are as nothing.

The tragedy of prodigalism is often very perplexing and contradictory. One can easily find some home within his knowledge where a son received no training in religion, saw no example of piety, was brought up under no restraint. Yet, without a single aid to high living he grows up dutiful, thoughtful, reverent — a lad any father would be well satisfied to call his son. By the laws of heredity and environment he ought to be a prodigal, but he is not; neither is he a Pharisee. He would be a very creditable product for a religious home. One can also lay his hand on some other home, where a son has been born in the line of faith; has been reared in an atmosphere of godliness; has been led into the paths of righteousness by a mother's influence, a father's authority. Yet, with everything in his favour, he breaks loose,

and sins grievously before man and God. He was expected to sustain the traditions of his house; and he might have been the son of a profligate. It is nonsense to say that the children of religious people, as a rule, turn out bad, and the children of irreligious people good; but Providence, in many cases, does seem to play at cross purposes with laws.

Very likely the cases would not seem so unreasonable if all the facts were before our judgment. It is quite possible that a father may not attend church nor possess any creed, may not be guarded in speech and conduct, and yet be kindly, generous, unselfish, winning. His children overlook his failings for the real humanity that is in him. They find in his natural goodness a substitute for religious influence. They have reasons to love him, and he that

once loves will not go astray. Yes; and it is also true that a sincere and consistent Christian may have been hard, severe, forbidding, so that his children trembled before him; and received their religion at the end of a stick. Is it altogether wonderful that under such a discipline young people should come to hate religion, and end in disgracing their father's name? Before any one can estimate the causes of this family disaster he would require to know not only the creed and order, but also the tone and temper of the prodigal's home. He is sometimes a surprise in nature, sometimes the sudden reappearance of an evil ancestor, but more often he is the result of an extreme severity, or, it may be, an extreme weakness on the part of good people.

Prodigal is too strong a word to describe a large number of children,

who are, however, a constant trial to their parents. They are bad-tempered, sullen, disobliging in the home, or they are frivolous, light-headed, unstable; or they are extravagant, wasteful, luxurious; or they are deceitful, unreliable, scheming. Sons will not fall into their father's plans, although they be most just and reasonable; daughters will form unfortunate attachments, which can only prove disastrous, and which the wider wisdom of older people would have prevented. It is one of the cruelest ironies of life that a man should spend the best years of his life in hard, self-denying, successful work to make a home for his family, such as neither he nor his people before him enjoyed, and that it should be made miserable for him by the disobedient self-will and impracticableness of his children: that a man should amass wealth,

every penny of which is a sign of industry and integrity, and that he should see it become an instrument of mischief — supporting incompetent sons in idleness, and making his daughter a gilded bait for mean-spirited fortune-hunters. The possibilities of joy and sorrow within a family are known only to God.

Given the best of children there must be from time to time some vexation to the heads of the house, and one good of this discipline is to send them back on early days. Were we ourselves always docile, considerate, affectionate, understanding? Did we never try the patience of our elders? did we never disappoint them? did we never grieve them? We enter into their feelings now, when it is too late to ask their forgiveness, but not too late to be penitent. Nothing becomes men and women like genuine regret for

the errors of the past. It fosters in us humility, tenderness, and mercy. Prodigalism in children has often produced saintship in parents.

Does not our pain give us an insight into the heart of the Eternal Father, Whose children we all are, and Whom we have all grieved? When we read our own feelings, then we have the faint shadow of His Whose love is ever wounded, Whose patience ever waits, Whose hope never fails. Between the earthly parents and their prodigals, and the Heavenly Father with His, there springs up a certain real sympathy, a certain community of thought. Both have suffered, both have made sacrifices; both have their reward in the future, both believe in the final victory of love. And our faint and despairing faith is caught up, established, and crowned in Him Who watcheth and will not

cease to watch, till from the wholesome misery of the far country in this world, or in that which is to come, the last of the prodigal children returns home.

CHAPTER VIII

OBSCURITY

Every person with the faintest ambition of soul has at some time desired fame, and has only resigned himself at last to obscurity with a pang. His achievement was not perhaps to be of the first order — but he hoped for a niche by itself where he would stand, for a space at least, while the multitude passed nameless and unnoticed. Youth is mercifully charged with hope, and casts a golden haze over the distant horizon, so that a bright lad may naturally see himself in high sunlit places and can hardly imagine the steep grey defile, up which with his fellows he must toil. Some

mother, with the pardonable and ever beautiful optimism of love, is dazzled by her son's precocious cleverness and gives him to understand that it is the merest question of time when he will have the world at his feet. Various pleasant omens sanction his ambitions — like land birds from the new world welcoming his ship — a prize at school or college, a compliment from a distinguished man, some reference in a paper, a little stroke of good fortune in business. Although years come and go without any sign of his kingdom yet is he still confident. One has to make his way slowly and arduously at first — has it not been so with the masters in every department? and he even congratulates himself on a little touch of adversity. He does not wish for too rapid success, it might spoil him and his work. As he reaches thirty his satisfaction with

non-recognition is a little laboured, and at forty, he has a grievance. When he comes to middle age he faces the situation with its hard bare facts and sees his last illusion of success vanish. It comes on him at last that he is not to be a distinguished person, but only one of the many who make up the mass of human life. For him there will be no excitement of events, no name passed from mouth to mouth, no achievement seen of all men, but only to do the same thing over and over again and as he looks out on the grey sky and the monotony of ordinary life rises up before him, he is cast down and loses heart.

The sense of obscurity is deepened by the spirit of the day which is restless and feverish. Last generation favoured the homely virtues and was satisfied with people who were diligent, faithful, well-living, and kind.

No doubt they might also be dull but no one seemed to remark this defect or to count them a bore. We have an absurd dread of the commonplace and are devoured with the craving for cleverness. We toil to speak in epigrams, we upset old customs; we do *outré* things; we affect strange views. Wit has replaced wisdom, and eccentricity is confounded with originality. Young people repudiate household duties and give themselves to 'missions': every sixth person attempts a book or an art. When ordinary people cannot make themselves heard by sane speech they shriek in order to catch attention and not be as their neighbours. The elders are criticised and belittled as old-fashioned, and the courteous manners of the past are despised. If one be aware that he is not in any way distinguished, but is as ten thousand of his neighbours, he is to-day apt

to be confounded and to take shame unto himself.

An obscure person may however find considerable consolation in the fact that, in spite of all posturing on the part of ambitious neighbours, the vast majority are really quite ordinary people like himself, and that the roll of fame in any age is very small. Will three men out of a city of half-a-million be known a hundred years afterwards? Do we not see men, who seemed to be something, pass into oblivion within a year of their death? The mighty man of a town has not been heard of four stations along the line, the oracle of a coterie is unknown in the next street. As generations pass across the stage — a long, unceasing stream of men and women, each with an individual life, how few faces do we recognise. There, we say, is St. Paul, that is Columbus, here is

Raphael, and we recognise Dante. Some hundred, or, it may be, only fifty names, and the rest are dust. Let us not, therefore, repine because we share the inevitable lot of our brethren, and have no hope of the greater fame.

And as for the little fame of our own time, it is shorter than we imagine. Reputation was never so quickly made, never so quickly dissipated as in our hurried day. If the heroes flaunt in the sun of popular applause, they have only an ephemeral life. The preacher who had a crowd ten years ago, is heard with languid interest to-day. The writer of many editions once is thankful at last to find a publisher. Let a statesman withdraw for a short space from the front, and the people ask themselves whether he is alive. Very likely the man speaks or writes as well as ever, but his audience is

fickle, and fashions change. He was once the vogue, and people hidden away in the crowd envied him: now he has disappeared and is also lost. It may be on the other hand that among that crowd there is a man of the first order, whose name will be recorded in the annals of the race, but his own time knows him not or sends him to death. Time, and time here means centuries, is the alone arbiter of fame, and casts contempt on tinsel crowns.

Besides, if it comes to notoriety, that is easily won. If a writer will only dabble in physical details, which decent minds ignore, he will be credited with nobility of intention and be read with prurient curiosity. Should a preacher fail with the message of the Gospels and the methods of the Master, he can tickle foolish ears with a piquant treatment of wages or murders. One has only to dress

absurdly and to cultivate a certain insolence of manner to have her name in people's mouths. And if all else fail, a shameful scandal or a crime will gain wider notice than is given to a saint. When it came to be a choice, one day long ago, the multitude preferred Barabbas to Christ, and a dancing-girl had more weight than John Baptist. To-day a prize-fighter would be welcomed by a larger crowd than a man of science, and a buffoon have wider appreciation than a poet. So poor and vulgar a thing is publicity.

Is it not also the case that we owe some of the greatest blessings in all spheres to men whose names have perished? Who compiled the Books of Moses? Who wrote the Epic of Job? Who poured out the bitterness of a wounded, disappointed heart in Ecclesiastes, who filled our mouth with the Psalms? Who first

ploughed the earth and sowed the seed? Who hollowed out a log and put out to sea? Who invented written characters? Who inaugurated commerce or created government? We do not know. And for the ordinary gifts on which our life depends, are we not indebted to obscure people? to sailors, miners, ploughmen, craftsmen, to servants, neighbours, friends. Our mother for instance, to whom we owe more than to any other person except Jesus Christ, was she conspicuous and dazzling by her talents? Perhaps she was, but what we remember was her love.

What remaineth for us obscurities — ordinary folks in every calling and place — is to accept the situation not only with submission but with perfect good-nature. Granted that we are not, say, poets or painters or even millionaires, we have some work to

do and some friends to love us. We have also some successes — when our bit of work is finished — and some joys, when we can help a brother in the battle. If no one knows our name outside our home and office, let us do our duty there with all our might. And let us lay to heart two consolations. If we have a talent and there be no room for it here we shall get our opportunity hereafter. In this life we and our fellows, millions with vast possibilities and no opportunities, are like seedlings packed together in boxes and longing for room. By and by the gardener will prick the young plants out in the open bed and each shall have its place, where in the sunshine and before the owner's eye it can come to full height. If this world be narrow the next will be wide. Nor should we forget, that after all the greatest affair in life is the creation of charac-

ter, and this can be accomplished as well in a cottage as in a palace. Finer webs, with more lasting and richer colour, are wrought in poor Eastern huts than in the huge sounding manufactories whose black smoke trails across the sky. It was in a very humble home that the Perfect man lived; and he has made the great success who, by patience and obedience in that which is least, has grown into the likeness of the Son of God.

CHAPTER IX

VANISHING ILLUSIONS

MANY ails of this life are so visible and full-bodied that every person acknowledges their existence and offers his sympathy to their victims, but some are so intangible and shadowy that people without imagination doubt their reality and treat any one who has had experience of them as if he had seen a ghost. If our neighbour has lost a relative, or has shares in a bankrupt bank, or is suffering from a painful disease, or even is crossed in love, we at once appreciate the situation, and give him such aid as we can in his straits. He has established a claim on our charity, and no one calls his distress

whimsical or affected. Suppose, however, he be cast down within his heart for reasons less easy to put in words. Because he is a true lover of Art and yet must be a clerk. Because he has the gift of song and has to teach little boys arithmetic. Because he had dreams of friendship, and they have mocked him. Because he had schemes of philanthropy, and has to toil for daily bread. Because he expected rest in religion, and behold, a sword. This man should be very careful in whom he places his confidence, and should have modest expectations of sympathy. If he be not laughed at as a fantastic person, he will be considered the creator of his own misery by the run of people, and will be reminded that the world has enough active trials without adding a crop of afflictions which are quite unreal.

People who have never been conscious of any ideals, and who therefore are safe against all disillusions, can hardly enter into his bitterness who has toiled up a long ascent in hope of the view at the top, and has only faced another hill; who has run for a crown and seen it crumble to dust in his hands. How this man imagined the days that were to be, the works he was to do, the pure joy he was to drink! How for the joy set before him he endured many a cross, beat down many a temptation, held the world at arm's length. And his reward? As it seems, nothing. He has been deceived, defrauded, befooled; he is set forth as a warning to all who cherish ideals, as a sermon to hold the imagination well in hand. Better to trudge along one's road without thinking of the horizon. Wiser to forget that life has any perspective, and to see it as a flat

surface of immediate duty. The prosaic people have chosen the better part if they be as matter-of-fact as they would have us believe, and if they have any portion at all for the soul, of which one is by no means sure. Better have no ideals that we may have no rude awakenings, since blighted hopes are worse to bear than lost possessions, and withered hearts than empty homes.

This advice has only one fault; it is a counsel of perfection, since no arguments of prudence or utility can purge human hearts of their secret dreams. As within some commonplace smoked-grimed house in a crowded street may be kept half-a-dozen pictures of the great period, so no one can be sure that there is one commonplace man or woman without some fond cherished illusion. This hard-worked general servant, — with only her day out and Sunday

for bits of blue in her grey sky — anticipates her own house — three poor rooms, but her home. More washing of dishes and more slaving than ever, yes, but her own dishes now and for her own folk. Yon mother, weighed down by the care of a young family and harassed by petty cares, sees her boys arising to call her blessed. That keen business man, the very scorn of sentiment, hopes by and by to have his cottage in the country with old-fashioned roses over the door. 'T is all very absurd, if you please, but 't is a fact to be acknowledged and not to be changed. It is one of the whims of human nature, and cannot be eliminated till we be all taken down to the foundation, and rebuilt on a sound, practical plan, without emotion, imagination, vision, without faith, hope, spirituality. Which will take some time in doing, and is not

going to be attempted in this life, nor even perhaps in the life to come.

Something, of course, may be done to starve ideals, and to reduce us all to a level of safety and dulness. Books of poetry ought to be placed under lock and key, for no one can estimate the damage done by such writings. Consider what a lift has been given to the soul and on what romantic quests it has been sent by the *Idylls of the King*, by *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, by Wordsworth's odes, by Burns's songs. Nor is history absolutely harmless, because some inflammable youth might be set on fire by Motley's *Dutch Republic* or Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Biography is dull enough, and yet who would guarantee that the life of Gordon might not lead to some foolish scheme of sacrifice. Literature in all her departments, except pure mathematics and natural science, has been a foolish, doting foster-mother

of illusions. Given a book, and anything may happen in the way of inspiration; given a personality, and some Peter may leave all to follow him. Nature herself is a conspirator, for even after precaution has been taken to refrigerate the soul, one might see a sunset, or a sunrise, and begin to glow.

What dangerously increases the charm and force of illusions is the evident sympathy of the Bible. It is, from beginning to end, a record of radiant hopes clouded, of great adventures fruitless, of fond imaginations disappointed, as it seems to flesh and blood. Abraham left his own country and his father's house to obtain an unseen land, and died having possessed nothing of Canaan save Sarah's grave. The Hebrews set out from Goshen for a land flowing with milk and honey, and perished in the wilderness. The

nation chose a king with vast enthusiasm, and the kingdom ended in disruption and disaster. The prophets depicted the glory of the Messianic age, when the nations should go up to Jerusalem, and the Holy City was laid in ruins. The apostles expected to sit on thrones with Jesus in this kingdom and were put to death by the sword. The early Christians looked unto the clouds of heaven to see Jesus coming in His power, and for twenty centuries there has been no sign. How the human heart has been excited, gladdened, misled, by the book which is as the shining of God's face.

The story of the Bible has been repeated within the soul, for manifestly this charge of sustained illusion can also be brought against the experiences of religion. God reveals Himself to us in some act of Providence or grace, and we set out on

His pursuit,—Who seems afterwards ever to elude our soul, ever to be just beyond our grasp. We fling ourselves in penitence upon the Divine mercy and hear an inward voice bidding us go into peace, and we enter that day on the longest, bitterest, hardest conflict of our life with sin and self. Magnificent promises embolden us to ask of God whatsoever we will, and the answers come long afterwards, and as something we never desired. Jesus calls us to the noblest service and speaks of a reward, and all His best disciples ever obtained this side of the grave has been labour, opposition, agony. Our souls picture a heaven of splendid circumstances and unbroken rest, and heaven will most likely be the beginning of a new service. Never was there any faith so beautiful as that of Jesus, never one has been so unsubstantial.

Ordinary life itself is only another illustration of illusion from our first day of consciousness to our death. The child builds his castles in the air and tells his fairy tales, and we smile at the young dreamer. Why should we, who are all such castle builders, such prolific 'makers'? The lad bears the discipline and restraint of school, for the hope of freedom and power held before him. How dangerous a liberty, how poor an authority when they come! The young workman in trade or business, in art or letters, tries to perfect himself in detail that he may achieve something by and by, and twenty years later he is not satisfied. The man of middle age bends his neck to the yoke that he may the sooner enter on his well-earned rest, and when it is eventide he lives again in the efforts of his children. Life is ever an ambition; never a posses-

sion. The pursuit of the ideal is not really a craze of certain minds, it is the necessity laid on us all: illusion is not one of the disabilities of life, it is a principle of Providence.

This principle *explains* life, clearing up some very perplexing mysteries and changing a riddle into a design. There is a world of difference between delusion and illusion. If life were so arranged that we should be led on in search of El Dorado, and should perish miserably having received nothing, then had we been cruelly wronged, and the evil-doer had been God. Upon those terms one could not believe in God, one must be a pessimist and an atheist. But if we be skilfully tempted to dig for gold in our neglected vineyard, not that we may find gold which would be a doubtful blessing, but that we may gather every year

richer clusters of the vine, then we have received beyond our expectations, and this good thing has come from God.

Our principle also *beautifies* life, for it suggests the tenderness and thoughtfulness of our Heavenly Father. For there are two methods of government, one by compulsion and one by allurement; and it is a proof of the Divine wisdom and goodness, that at every step of life we are invited, not threatened. Prizes are continually held before our eyes, and we are strengthened to endure by the joy set before us. For the heritage of manhood a child does not complain of pupilage; for the achievements of success a young man welcomes risk and peril; for the sweetness of rest a man accepts the hardships of labour. So we are helped up the steep way that leadeth to the stars, ever refreshed with a

new hope, ever discovering a new horizon.

And this principle *assures* us of the real gain of life. It may seem as if we were getting nothing; in reality we are heirs of everything. What a boy earns at school is not a medal but knowledge. What he earns in after years is not wealth but character. What a Christian receives from faith is not an escape from punishment but the gift of everlasting life. What Abraham received in the end was not the land of Canaan but God Himself, the strength and portion of the human soul. For illusions are like the bright and fragrant spring blossom which is scattered on the ground, but leaves behind it the sure earnest of a golden autumn.

CHAPTER X

THE DEFEATS OF THE SOUL

EACH person has two lives — one of which is known to the world, one of which is hidden. The former life could be written by an acquaintance, for the material lies ready to his hand and can be gathered in the light of day. It would have chapters on childhood, youth, manhood, middle age; chapters on school, university, office, home; chapters on politics, creed, philanthropy, public service; chapters on successes, failures, trials, honours. Perhaps it might even have a chapter on character, whereat this man himself would smile sadly for the virtues he never really had. This biography may be written by

any pen, for there is no copyright in these things; and it may be scattered abroad, for there is no secrecy. When people read this life they are apt to imagine that everything has been told, and that the man has been revealed. We are so easily satisfied with an appearance; we are so slow to suspect the heart within. This catalogue of dates, places, events, words, traditions, functions, the story of a life! It is only the green grass and flowers which conceals a treasure or a grave — a common photograph of the face which any passer-by can see upon the street.

The other life is unknown to one's mother, and is barely suspected by the shrewdest friend, but it is real, influential, eternal. It also has chapters which do not turn on numbers or geography, which have yielded nothing to newspapers or gossip. That Sunday — year forgot-

ten: the old church — mother remembered, and the softness of her sealskin jacket: preacher in pulpit — name first unknown: text from somewhere — could not find it for father in evening: could not even give heads afterward — was supposed to have behaved badly in church: and to this day we can recall the sensation. When men write diaries for publication after death they call this experience conversion, but the boy had no name for it — said nothing about it — dares hardly believe even to this day that God spoke unto him. One night the lad could not sleep, although in perfect health and very tired after a day out-of-doors. He had been taken unawares that afternoon, and now repented bitterly of the lie. The shining of the moonlight, the whiteness of his bed, the stillness of the room — all affright, shame, condemn him. He has been

caught, broken, degraded within himself, and is a thing of contempt. He is an old man now, and has had many sore tussles with sin, but that wound still smarts at a time, and the scar will always be seen. One morning a man flung aside his books, and went out upon the hill. For hours he tramped across the heather till he came to a lonely spot where a river rises from its spring, and then he sat himself down to settle the matter. What matter? It would hardly be believed by his friends who know the common-sense, hard-headed, middle-aged man, but it was the question whether there be a God, what He is, and who we are. When he came back in the light of the setting sun, his face was full of peace. Unwritten chapters, the origin, maybe, of a long soul biography that shall have in it much of joy and sadness, many defeats and many victories.

It is indeed difficult to know whom one ought to pity or envy, for one knows so little about the inner life. You have often been concerned about a neighbour because he had lost a child or was in narrow circumstances, or suffered from weak health, or was out of society. Perhaps you would have saved your sympathy for some more needy case had you dwelt for an hour in that man's soul, which was closed against the vexations of the world, which was enriched with the gifts of God, where the divine peace ever rested, and the angels of God were frequent guests. You have in thought congratulated another friend because all things seem to work together for his good, and the sun is ever shining on his life. You had changed your mind after one glimpse into his soul, with its fierce passions, its unredeemed materialism,

its dominant selfishness, its black unbelief. For each man lives two lives — the one in the outer court, where the world comes and goes; and the one within the veil, where he is alone — and the real joy of living is the light of God within, and the sense of victory over sin.

Various experiences of the secret life fill one with shame, but the persistence of a besetting sin drives one near to despair. Far back in childhood this evil visitor first appeared in our soul, and filled us with horror. We shrank from his touch, and ordered him out at the door. For a while his face was not seen, and we had forgotten the incident. One day he is found hanging round the out-skirts of our life like a restless predatory vagrant, and after a few months, when we are accustomed to his appearance, he crosses the threshold and pleads for house-room.

Times there are when we drive him forth in anger; times there are when we endure his presence. He comes to have his place and his employment in our soul, a vagabond of whom we are ashamed but whom we tolerate, whom we condemn but whom we would miss. Now and again our conscience awakes and arises to put the house in order, and then there is a fiery scene and our unholy lodger is banished, with strict warning never to return. Within a few days the unabashed figure finds the door on the latch and makes for his accustomed corner with a leer, and we are so disheartened that it seems no use to dispute his coming.

The unspeakable disgrace of this lifelong partnership is one of the horrors of the soul and the cause of its bitterest self-reproach. Our friends remarked, say, our fierce temper in childhood, but were certain it

would be mastered when we had more understanding. Youth brought no self-restraint, and our hot head involved us in acts of reckless insubordination. Manhood, with its cares and responsibilities, did not lay this evil spirit to rest. The calm dignity of old age was humiliated by the same fits of passion that had devastated our youth. We have passed from stage to stage of life, but have not shaken off this sin; we have changed our house again and again but have not left this fellow-tenant. We have worn out several bodies but not this body of death. It guarantees our identity, it maintains our continuity, it links us with the past. People who had not seen us for half a lifetime recognise us without hesitation. Our eyes are the same colour, our voice is in the same key, and our temper is as fresh and strong and masterful as ever.

It does sometimes happen that we are rid of a sin not because we have conquered it but because it has grown effete. There are sins of foolishness that die for want of nourishment with the thinner blood of age, but their vacant place is apt to be taken by others which are quite as pestilent and which have come to stay. An exchange of sins can hardly be called a victory of the soul, for one has gained little who was once a voluptuary and now is a miser. The Protean variety of sin gets upon the nerves, and one has the sense of being shadowed by an enemy who is ever appearing in some new disguise and is ever on one's track. It seems an almost hopeless campaign, because it has no truces, because it is an endless series of battle-grounds, because it is not likely to have any end, till death. And then, what if death

does not cut this miserable union, and our sin and our soul begin life together on the other side? What if the humiliation of these few years be perpetuated through the ages?

It may seem impossible to get any consolation out of this conflict, but at least the shame of it is certain to cleanse us from all self-righteousness and to inspire us with humility. He is coated with triple brass who should be assailed by fiery temptations and yet have no sympathy with a neighbour's conflict, who should be overcome by the power of an ancient sin and yet have no charity for the fall of a brother. When one is fighting for his life every day with temptation he can hardly be a Pharisee. If people, through thinness of nature or an overmastering prudence, are never inclined to transgress, they are apt to be censorious and unmerciful,

but he who has many scars carries a tender heart.

Frequent disasters of the soul deliver us from shallow views of religion and convince us that we need more for our security than an example. No power can be of much avail that does not act from within and reinforce us in the crises of temptation. What one longs for is a second alliance — this time with a Saviour. If there be any one in heaven or earth who has gone through the same agony and has come out victor, who has a fellow-feeling with other men and is ready to join forces with them ; then we need not abandon hope although the past has been one uninterrupted defeat. It is at this point of despair many people have turned to Jesus and made trial of Him for the first time. Before, they may have believed or disbelieved about Him, they knew nothing of

Him, because He was outside, a historical, theological personage. When one, as a last resource, has received Jesus within and begins to wage war in His fellowship, then it comes to pass that the Gospels are repeated in his inner life, and a plain man will have his own materials before he dies, both for a book of Psalms and a biography of Jesus.

CHAPTER XI

THE VEILING OF THE SOUL

In one of his *Twice-Told Tales*, Hawthorne describes how a much-loved Puritan minister conceived the weird idea of concealing his face with a veil and how his people were affected with a sense of painful mystery as he went in and out among them with covered countenance till the end of his days. His betrothed forsook him; the bride trembled before him at her marriage; children fled from him on the road; people whispered as he passed. One realises in an instant, as he reconstructs the scene, how much of the confidence and joy of life depend on our beholding one another, literally, with

open face. Imagine the change and horror, if one morning each man's face was covered with black and impenetrable to his neighbour. Laughter would cease on earth; who then would have the heart for mirth under this cloud? None would be able to comfort his neighbour, for none could estimate his brother's sorrow. Speech would languish, for it would have no visible response. Love itself would die when every emotion was masked. The very power of association and the instinct of trust would be destroyed when every man had withdrawn into darkness. Were there no revelation of the face then there would be neither faith nor fellowship possible on earth.

It is possible to give this image of the veil a more spiritual direction and a more searching meaning. St. Paul in his great chapter on Charity

imagines that the covering is really upon the soul, and he is much affected by the fact that we see nothing, neither truth nor people clearly. We see not 'face to face,' but rather as those studying one another 'through a glass darkly.' We do not understand our neighbour, we speculate about him. He is to us an unknown quantity, and we deal with him as a chemist with a new material. There are about him certain properties — evidence he has flung out, as it were, for our guidance — his looks, his speech, his actions, his habits. These we collect and analyse; we form a list of components; we strike a balance; we conclude he is this or that. Very likely we assign him a label, and speak as if he were classified. Yet we are aware of our ignorance and helplessness; we are bitterly conscious that the very essence of

the man has escaped and defied all our tests. Sometimes we remark of some one 'he is difficult to know'; perhaps it were nearer the truth to say that it is impossible to know any one.

Consider, for instance, how seldom six sensible and charitable people will agree as to the character of some mutual friend, so many considering that his strong point is sweet temper, while the others insist that it is self-restraint. Consider, also, what a power of surprise lies in even shallow natures, so that one whom we thought the weakest develops an immovable obstinacy, and one whom we considered unfeeling shows himself capable of immense unselfishness. What unexpected loyalties or treacheries; what deeds of heroism or meanness; what intellectual achievements or imbecilities emerge in lives we prided ourselves

on having surveyed and sounded. Times there were when we seemed to have mapped out every inch in a friend's life, times there are when it seems as if we had only sailed along the coast. We may ascend some open river for a distance, but the heart of this continent remains a mystery. Is it not the case that a man and a woman may live together in the sacred intimacy of wedlock, sharing as it appears, and as they imagine, every feeling, hope, belief, and yet discover with a shock of disappointment that each is completely fenced round and secluded from the other?

This veil is not to be thought of as an expedient of the individual to preserve his privacy, for he cannot remove it any more than his neighbour. For one thing it is physical, and must last while we are in this present environment. If the body

be an instrument of revelation so that by our eyes and mouth and hands we declare ourselves, it is also a thick cloak of concealment, so that only as one pierces through the flesh can he reach the soul. No doubt the countenance, as the years pass, is dominated by the soul and grows into its likeness. The saint looks out on us through a clear window, and the evil-liver has his character written on his face. One, however, knows how often in the beginning the shape of the body is a contradiction of the soul; for nothing is more common than a perfect face giving a deceptive certificate to hollowness and insincerity, or homely features discrediting honesty and affection. We are indeed so sensible of this anomaly that our minds are almost inclined to accept it as an axiom that where Nature has given the form of Venus

it is safe to expect folly, but where she has condescended to the face of Socrates, there one may be certain of wisdom.

And this veil is also another patent proof that the mercy of God is over all His works, for surely we ought to be thankful that in this present life our souls are screened from public view. As Nature conducts her initial processes in secret — and it were cruel to lay them bare — so does the Divine Spirit pursue His work upon the soul in darkness. If it were permitted to any human hand to expose a soul, then none in this life could stand the trial. What motives of self-interest, movements of unholy passion, base feelings of envy, hot fits of anger disturb and defile the soul even of a saint! It is indeed through this very discipline of temptation and ceaseless conflict

with evil that the soul is purified and strengthened, and comes at last to perfection. While we are still struggling through our Purgatorio no prying eye may criticise or condemn, in the Paradiso the veil can be safely dropped from God's finished work.

If this veiling of the soul be inevitable in the present dispensation, it has serious dangers which we must remember and conquer. Every one of us is liable to be misunderstood and to suffer injustice. If we could explain ourselves and let everything be known, then they had not called us ungenerous, or proud, or bigoted, or heretical, or something else that may not be worse than we are, but happens not to be what we are. It is quite fair we should be condemned for our faults; it is not fair we should be condemned for our no faults; and yet for the most part any protest is

useless. Many a private person in a household, many a labourer in the public service, many a teacher in the Church, has been misconstrued and misjudged all his days without relief. Let him not complain overmuch. When one remembers how hard it is to understand himself, and how often he has erred both in self-depreciation and self-approval, it is not wonderful that one should be misunderstood by other people. The situation is not without its consolations: through all His life, from Nazareth to Calvary, Jesus was never understood except by Mary of Bethany and St. John.

Perhaps it were better for most of us to complain less of being misunderstood and to take more care that we do not misunderstand other people. It ought to give us pause at a time to remember that each one has a stock of cut-and-dry judgments on

his neighbours, and that the chances are that most of them are quite erroneous. What our neighbour really is we may never know, but we may be pretty certain that he is not what we have imagined, and that many things we have thought of him are quite beside the mark. What he does we have seen, but we have no idea what may have been his thoughts and intentions. The mere surface of his character may be exposed, but of the complexity within we have not the faintest idea. People crammed with self-consciousness and self-conceit are often praised as humble, while shy and reserved people are judged to be proud. Some whose whole life is one subtle studied selfishness get the name of self-sacrifice, and other silent heroic souls are condemned for want of humanity.

Perhaps the saddest calamity of our veiled state is the misunderstand-

ing that sometimes arises between people who are of the same family or are close friends. It is not easily removed or explained; it may rather deepen than lessen with the years; it may last for life. Nothing surely can be a sorer cross than the alienation of one whom we love, whom we trust, whom once we made our confidant. Whether the outside world appreciate one is of secondary importance, it takes the heart out of one to be daily misread by his own. How one longs for the shining of the sun, and the dispersion of the cloud! That day may never come this side the grave; in such an event let it be our consolation that those who have been estranged shall at last know even as they are known. Like ships that start on the great voyage together, and lose sight of one another in the fog, what can friends do but feel their way with

caution and patience, lest there be collision and disaster, till at the final sunrise they cast anchor side by side in the fair haven of peace, and see one another 'face to face.'

CHAPTER XII

PERPLEXING PROVIDENCES

No one can read the Old Testament without observing that its writers are greatly concerned about the way in which Providence treats the righteous man. They take for granted that he ought to be favoured of God, and that the unrighteous man ought to suffer; but it appears as if God shone upon the wicked and frowned on the good. The Psalmist complains bitterly that vile men are exalted. The prophets mention as one of the signs of the golden age that the churl shall no longer be counted bountiful. The Book of Job is a profound discussion of the apparent contradiction

of Justice, and the writer of Ecclesiastes almost lost hope of a world where the same lot is assigned to saint and sinner. When the righteous are blessed or when the unrighteous are punished, a load is lifted from the conscience and reason of these thinkers, and it appears as if their faith would hardly have any trial were this mystery of government solved. Let every man get his due, then

> 'God 's in his heaven,
> All 's right with the world.'

Perhaps the West can hardly appreciate the force of this complaint to the full, because it has not felt its pressure. We have not known what it is to be wronged and robbed, to be cruelly oppressed, and to suffer the last outrage in our homes without protection or redress. While the hope of justice remains a man

can endure, when justice sides with the criminal the victim's blood turns to gall. The fierce energy of the West has wrought salvation, breaking to pieces the power of the tyrant, compelling equal laws, surrounding justice with a wall of fire, casting an invincible shield over the helpless. Certain passages of the Bible are obsolete for the West and are to us hardly intelligible. Our fathers knew their meaning. There are Christians in the East to-day that will still read them with passion. These passages are the litany of the poor, of the helpless, of women and children, the appeal of all miserables to a silent God, Who will not move, Who seems not to care, Who has, notwithstanding, been partaker of the human Gethsemane, and Himself inspired the passion of this cry.

We of the West have our own quarrel with Providence — although

it be on a minor scale — and it frets our souls at a time and dashes the sweetness of faith. It appears as if through carelessness or blindness certain individuals had been confused in the arrangement of affairs, so that A receives the recompense of B, and B is condemned to the lot of A. One man is honourable, high-spirited, religious, faithful. His word is certain, his friends trust him unto death, his family adore him, the world counts him righteous. Here is one who surely will have riches and power and honour and comfort, who will be crowned with fame before all the people. And instead thereof his whole life is a struggle with poverty, trials, and obscurity. He is not called to dignity but to pity. Another man is selfish, tricky, merciless, mercenary, whose word goes for nothing, who has done base things, whom no one in private re-

spects. He ought to be an object of contempt — left alone in his place till he repents and does righteousness. Yet because the fellow has plausible manners and a fluent tongue and a cunning intellect he too often wins his way with the multitude and retains their suffrages and lives at his ease. As he drives into the city, the mud from this intriguer's carriage-wheels defiles the coat of the righteous man. This contrast may not be common, but it does occur, and it raises questions — about the fairness of Providence.

This immoral situation makes good living harder for us all, and surely any artificial hindrance is scarcely needed. Many of us are bitterly conscious of the temptation to do less than our best and require every enforcement of virtue. Here before our eyes is a parable teaching us in so many words that integrity

and piety are only the high-road to failure, and that showy and unscrupulous methods are the passport to success. There are some whom no allurements can seduce from the way of righteousness, and whom the sight of the low estate of goodness will only establish in their integrity. Others are ready enough to hearken to any voice which declares that the gods do not see behind but are as easily deceived as foolish people. Is it not dangerous for the individual that the way of unrighteousness be laid out as a primrose path, while the way of honour is narrow and strait?

Is not this confusion of lots also like a misdirection from the bench and an injustice to society? If there be a sense of the distinction between goodness and badness in the community ought it not to receive the support and sanctions of the Eter-

nal? Do we not as nations turn to history to read with relish the downfall of iniquity, and the victory of righteousness? Are we not in social life ever on the alert for convincing illustrations of that unseen power which shapes human life according to the law written in our conscience? What a wanton blow to our poor perplexed consciences to see a despicable person, whose hand we would not take in the way of friendship, selected for a crown, and a saint, who has been an inspiration to us in the conflict of the soul, allotted a cross. Can our commonwealth be blamed if it follow the lead of Providence and set rascals on high and hold the children of the kingdom in scorn?

So it comes to pass that we begin by being concerned about good men, and end by being concerned about God. Is He also careless whether

one choose the higher or lower way, whether he feed or mortify his evil self? Are fools and cowards, vain and proud persons, the same to Him as the men of the Beatitudes? This is a very serious question, vital and final. If God be on the right side, then there is not a good man anywhere who will not hold up his head: if God goes over to the enemy, then it seems no use that the rest of us continue the fight. Let us fling away our scruples and join in the general scramble. Of course we know what God has said: His words are in the Law of Moses and in the Sermon on the Mount; they are graven on our hearts. We also see what God does, and His deeds and His words do not correspond. This is the problem of Providence, and it is not light.

We ought carefully to remember first of all that Providence has not

finished its work with those two men and their affairs. It is at the foot of the page the figures are added, and till the columns are filled up no one can say whether the debtor or creditor side has the advantage. Life has many surprises, and some of them are very cheering. Knaves come oftentimes to shame and beggary much to the relief of society: just men suddenly win their rights to every one's delight. Wickedness may succeed to-day and to-morrow, and be made a hissing and a reproach the third day. Honour may be set in the pillory and be pelted by the rascal multitude for a day and be clothed in purple and borne to her throne at eve of sun. And if this happy event come not to pass in our time, then the figures will be carried over the page and the balance will be struck on the other side. Dives and Lazarus in this world

may seem an argument against Providence: the argument has to be modified when you meet the two men in the next world. God has an infinite patience, and does not make haste: it will be soon enough to judge His ways when they are complete.

Is it not also our misfortune to be dazzled by the glitter of this world and to identify the rewards of God with material prosperity? If one be rich and increased in goods, if he hold high station in church or state, then is it not evident that God has blessed him? If one live in a small house and his name be not known two streets away, then surely God has not blessed him. Could any standard be more shallow, deceptive, unbelieving, ungodly? It would seem as if the New Testament had never been written and Jesus had never lived in Nazareth! If the teaching

of Jesus goes for anything, worldly success is no sign of divine approval, but is rather a very trying discipline; hardship is no evidence that God is disowning a man, but, maybe, the most convincing gift of His fatherly love. Joseph of Arimathea was no dearer to Christ than St. John, and although Nero lived in a palace and wore the purple, while St. Paul was chained to a soldier and imprisoned in the barracks, the Apostle had not been willing to change with the Emperor. When God is pleased and wishes to bless the men He loves, His hands have other gifts than silver and gold.

It is more than probable, moreover, that the accounts are being squared here and now but that our eyes are holden. Is it absolutely certain that our Dives rejoices as one on whom God's face is shining? What of the reprobation of good

men, the gnawing misery of self-contempt, the conscious impoverishment of the soul, the haunting dread of the future? Are there none who would give all they have won by years of scheming and self-degradation for a quiet conscience and a good character? Does it go without saying that our Lazarus is miserable because he is not clothed in fine linen and does not dine sumptuously every day? May he not have his own consolations? Surely it is no mean compensation for a severe life and narrow circumstances to be able to look every man in the face, to have the loyal friendship of six honest men, to leave an unstained name as the heritage of his children, to hear God say in the stillness of his soul: 'Well done, my son.'

CHAPTER XIII

THE WORLD-SORROW

It must seem to detached minds a very work of perfection, that while each of us has to bear his own burden, certain people cannot be content without also adding the burden of the world, and tasting a double share of sorrow. No one, however, may judge this sorrow to be light or fantastic, for this were to shut his eyes to facts and to deny a conspicuous trend of present-day thought. Many strong thinkers have sorrowfully abandoned the idea of divine government, some ordinary folk have lost the comfort of religious faith, hot heads have preached the 'Red Terror,' kind hearts have thrown away their enthusiasm on impossible

schemes, young people have committed suicide because the creation 'groaneth and travaileth in pain.' Our fathers quarrelled with their neighbours and argued themselves into madness over metaphysical mysteries, such as the sovereignty of God. But a large number of serious people are chiefly concerned to-day about the problems: 'Is there any Heaven beyond the grave?' and 'Why are so many of our brethren living in Hell this side of the grave?'

No one can read a newspaper without meeting many horrors, and having his optimism very rudely shattered. In Africa, English troops shoot down savages with arms of scientific precision; in Asia, Mohammedans butcher Christians with every circumstance of brutal barbarity; in America, white mobs burn negroes to death; in Europe, armed hosts

wait the signal for war. Rich people grow richer and more luxurious, flaunting their extravagances, their insolences, their vices in face of the world; poor people herded together in great cities grow more discontented and bitter in their squalor and poverty. The ancient fear of God, with reverence, loyalty, and purity, seems to be almost dead, and a hundred signs go to prove that pleasure is fast becoming our God. In spite of a growing humanitarianism gross outrages are still perpetrated on dumb animals, on helpless women, on innocent children. What must be the sum of one day's misery over the world!

'Perpetual moanings from the troubled sea
Of human thought, and wails from the vexed wind,
Of mortal feeling, fill our life's wide air.'

Times there are when we decline to remember this Inferno and refuse

to look over its brink. We are disgusted and offended by any reference to its tragedy, and would prefer that it should be discreetly covered from sight. The news from this far country hinders our full enjoyment in the Father's house. It comes between us and our ease, so that we cannot laugh and talk and eat and sleep so pleasantly, with such pictures forced on our eyes, with such stories in our minds. Certainly the chronicles of life, either on battle-fields or east-ends, are not appetising or agreeable reading; but the reason why we shrink from reading them is not our sensitive tender-heartedness but our fastidious selfishness. If such wickedness is being done and such agony being endured it is right and necessary that we should know, and cowardly if we refuse to know. He is less than human, to say nothing of Christian, who can walk the streets

of one of our cities at midnight, or read the reports from the consuls in Armenia without having his heart wrung.

Various questions force themselves upon the most sluggish mind beneath the shadow of this Gethsemane, and the deepest has to do with God. We are driven past the victim and the oppressor, past laws and governments, to the source of power and order. Where is God, what is He doing, how does He feel about this horror? If one of us had the authority, would he not in one hour bring this immense misery to an end? And One has almighty and supreme authority. Why does He make no sign? Goaded and maddened by the contradiction of the situation — the love of God, and the sorrow of men, earnest and reverent minds are driven to abandon one side or the other, and since none can deny the sorrow they

give up the love. Which means giving up God, for it were better to believe in no God than in a cruel or indifferent God who would not lift a hand although the world were filled with blood and tears. People who cannot believe in a greater devil are not to be counted heretics; their unbelief is a tribute to the honour of God. The worst heretics are those who have no difficulty about the government of the world because they have comfortable homes and have suffered no wrongs. Their faith is not religion, it is only Pharisaism and selfishness.

This fact of world-suffering is perhaps our darkest problem, and it cannot be faced without touching another and earlier. Something goes before suffering, and that is sin; and it is amazing that we make so much of the one and think so little of the other. No doubt there are people in

this world who suffer without having sinned — the vicarious victims of the race; but it still remains true that if men had obeyed the Law of Righteousness written in their hearts, this world had not been a Gehenna. Were men to keep Christ's commandment of love, there is hardly any form of human misery that would not be ended in two generations. It is, therefore, missing the mark to conclude that this world is misgoverned unless one be sure that the government has been obeyed, and as a matter of fact we all know very well that the opposite has been the case. Every one does more or less what he ought not to do, and comes into collision with law and so his fingers and other people's are burned. The punishment is severe; but then that does not prove that the world is an anarchy, it rather proves a very just and strong government.

It may of course be urged that this only pushes the difficulty a stage farther back and raises the hopeless question: Why God permitted evil. Here the most daring speculator gets beyond his depth and is certain to be carried away. We can only be clear on one point, that liberty of choice implies the possibility of choosing wrong and that liberty of choice is essential to the formation of character. There is no danger that a slave should wander from home, for ere he got any distance he had been caught and brought back. Slaves can be shackled and confined. They are saved from becoming prodigals, but under this régime they can never grow into men; they will remain undeveloped, weakly, neutral, neither good nor evil, mere human chattels. It is the glory of a son that he is free; it is his perilous privilege to go astray. As a free

man he departs into the far country and plays the fool. So it comes to pass that he suffers desperately, and comes back in hunger and rags. When he does return it will not be as he went out, but wiser, stronger, better in nature.

If the end of Providence were to secure this race in a garden of Eden, lapped round with comfort where no one should ever taste hunger or pain or loss, then let it be freely granted that this world is a conspicuous failure. It is so badly arranged and so loosely governed that it would bring scandal on a human monarch. Things are so much out of joint that we are obliged to seek for another working theory of life than the garden one, and we find it in the New Testament. Jesus and His Apostles teach that the supreme success of life is not to escape pain, but to lay hold on righteousness, not

to possess, but to be holy, not to get things from God but to be like God. They were ever bidding Christians beware of ease, ever rousing them to surrender and sacrifice. They never complained of their own hard lot, but rather considered that it was gain. Winds blowing off the snow breed hardy men, and fierce seas breaking on rocky coasts make skilful seamen; and if the mind of God was to compel this race up the arduous road that leads to perfection, our dark experience is an open secret.

It is a shallow optimism that would take a rose-coloured view of the world, whose moan ought ever to be in our ears. It is an inexcusable pessimism that denies the progress of the race with the centuries. To-day there are wars at a time and in places; once it was war at all times and everywhere. To-day so many

women are the victims of man's sin; once all women were his slaves. To-day a massacre fires our blood; once it was an ordinary event. To-day the poor are at least helped; once they were left to perish. The agony of one age is the birth of a better life for its child, and every martyr gains some good for those following. It is a ghastly struggle any way one looks at it, but it is not meaningless nor fruitless. The day breaks slowly, and the sun as yet hardly pierces through the banks of black cloud, but the East is glowing and the darkest is past.

Above all, it ought to be a strong consolation to every one, bitter and perplexed about the sorrow of the race, that God is its partaker. Whatever might be His wise and gracious purpose, and however necessary and proper might be His means of fulfilling it, it were still a trial to faith

to imagine Him watching from a distance and a place of peace this hurly-burly of sin and pain and shame and despair. It is another thing when He comes through Jesus His Son into the midst of the battle, and Himself receives its most cruel wounds, when down the ages He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in the midst of the Throne there is a Lamb as He once was slain. There is hope and strength in this remembrance that the sorrow of the world is the sorrow of God, and the Redeemer of the world is God Himself.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL SUFFERING

When Jesus' disciples were one day arrested by the sight of a blind man sitting in his pathetic helplessness at the door of God's Temple, and asked the Master the meaning of his calamity, they touched a problem which is fresh in our day, and which has ever in it the blood of the human heart. Every city is studded with hospitals, where hundreds have begun to suffer or have been suffering long. No inconsiderable number of one's acquaintance have never known the joy of full health, but are daily contending against some secret weakness. In our own family there may be a member cut off from

the activities of life, who the day long is wearying for night, and all night is watching for the dawn. What does this calamity mean? Surely it is not natural that men and women and little children should be blind, or maimed, or paralysed, or in any way crippled. Rather, people ought to be strong and buoyant, able for all the labour and pleasures of life. Why should a certain proportion of the race be called forth to live in Gethsemane? This is a question on which, for his own or his brethren's sake, one longs for light.

Various answers may be given, and each one may satisfy some mind. It can be urged, for instance, that there is no problem, because a problem means a difficult principle which can be solved, but this matter of physical suffering is an accident. Until the delicate processes of nature

and the complicated activity of human life perform their parts with unerring accuracy, there will be failures and calamities. Nature is a huge and intricate machine, from which each person is thrown off like a piece of cloth from a loom. We watch the whirling wheels and flying shuttles with some understanding of the construction, but with no power of interference. A wheel drags ever so slightly, a thread has a rough edge — any slight flaw — and a section of the web is damaged. So one of us begins life at a disadvantage, and this can only be avoided by a series of miracles going back, say, a century. Some day a signalman, being over-worked or out of sorts, pulls the wrong handle and a train is wrecked, with physical consequences which may last for two generations. A child not yet born will be a cripple for life, but nothing

could have saved that child save miraculous interference in that signal-box. And God is not prodigal of miracles, even to avert catastrophes. His providence comes in later to utilise them for material ends; His grace sanctifies them to spiritual issues. Really it is not wonderful, considering how fine and sensitive the eye is, that here and there a man is blind; it is amazing that with this exception every person sees.

Or it may be pointed out with irresistible force that suffering can be traced, often at a long interval, in some cases to sin, and that is simply one of the wholesome sanctions of law. We are firmly convinced that we live in a moral universe, and by that we mean in a state where it will be made pleasant to do what is right, and very unpleasant to do what is wrong, at

least in physical affairs. If one play the fool and slap Nature in the face, that power will take up the quarrel and pursue it to the end with the man and his descendants till she has obtained complete satisfaction. If one make a covenant with Nature and keep her laws loyally, this power will remember him for good, and his children after him, opening her hand and blessing them with health and strength. With her saving judgments and her abundant mercies, Nature fences up the way of life that we may be induced to walk therein with steadfast step. And if any one break through the hedge, it is good that he suffer; and if it be that its actual transgressor do not pay all the debt, but that the innocent must share his liability, this is only the inevitable consequence of the solidarity of the family and the race. None can interfere

between the sinner and his penalty, and we can even see that it is well none should, for in so far as one accepts his chastisement with a right mind the pain leaves peace behind.

One also recognises that suffering is a choice instrument for shaping character, and that without its touch the most delicate chasing on the vessel would be impossible. It is an actual pleasure to look at a perfectly healthy man, who sleeps without a dream and works without fatigue, whose blood is clean, and whose vitality is inexhaustible. He is excellent company for other strong men — a buoyant, optimistic, victorious nature — but he has his limitations. It is not easy for the preacher of Christ's Evangel to reach this man, for he is entrenched in his fortunate experiences and good-humoured contentment. He is glad to know that

there are promises for broken-down people, but as things have gone well with him they make no impression on his soul. The next world will be remarkable if it excel this present state, which has been excellently arranged and entirely satisfactory. No doubt the soul is superior to the body; but at the same time he cannot forget that his body has served him perfectly. His unshaken and exuberant health leaves him invulnerable against every spiritual appeal. It is not to this Samson that the vision of the unseen comes, but to St. Paul with his perpetual tormenting thorn, to St. John cast as a dry seaweed on the shore of Patmos. When one wants to hear the secret things of God, or to delight one's eyes with the finer shades of grace, he leaves the market-place and visits some one who wrestles daily with cruel pain and has come

to know death as a familiar friend. Without the last touch of pain certain natures had never come to their perfect sweetness and autumn colour.

Nor can it be denied that without the stimulus of suffering the Race had never started on its upward career. When the early physical processes had done their work and man appeared as an animal with the soul inbreathed by God Himself, he was, morals apart, simply a savage, — naked, idle, ignorant, useless. As soon as he was cast forth from Eden, where he had been saved from exertion, and set himself to work, he began to rise, and the compelling force was the prick of hunger. The fair house of human achievement contains now many treasures of letters and art, but its foundations were the hard and inevitable struggle for bread. First the rough hoe, and

afterwards the lyre, the pen, and the brush. If a vagabond of the city is ever to be civilised, he must first of all learn to work, and the one certain persuasive is hunger. When this fiercest of all pangs seizes him, he will bestir himself, and so soon as he puts his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, he has started on the right way, and either he or his children may reach the top some day. Pain is the spur which drives the Race along its ordered path of progress.

All those uses and benefits of pain are, however, open to two criticisms. Some of them are ethical but partial in their operations, as, for instance, invalidism, which purifies one person and hardens another; others are universal but not ethical, as, for instance, the action of hunger. One is therefore moved to seek about for some end of pain which will affect men

generally and ethically, and in the search this incident comes under his notice. A congregation made up of well-to-do and easy-going people, whom the preacher has sought to move to the pity and service of their fellow-creatures, as, he fears, in vain, is coming out of church. Just as they emerge from the church a runaway horse knocks down and tramples upon a young child. She is only a child of the city, nameless and not lovely, who has been in the park, and was trudging home with a few buttercups in her hand. Her misery and suffering are nothing compared with the vast spiritual deprivations of the world which the preacher has laboured. It does not matter: in such circumstances people do not criticise nor calculate. A little maid has been hurt, and her calamity conquers the heart. Men are instantly shaken out of their composure and

rush to her aid; women forget their finery and wipe away the blood. A whole company are of a sudden delivered from their selfishness and inspired with human interest. Every sin — pride, vanity, hardness, envy — is suspended; every virtue — love, sacrifice, gentleness, humility — is called into exercise. What could not be done by the eloquence of the preacher was accomplished by the suffering of the child. A crowd of ordinary people has been suddenly raised to practical sainthood by a stroke.

The same effect is produced upon a congregation on Hospital Sunday in an English city. Where the subject of the sermon is dogma or exposition the chances are that the audience will be more or less bored or divided; if the plea be for missions, the hearers may have objections on principle or detail. Let the

preacher put the case of suffering before their imagination, and a congregation is at once simply waiting and longing for the opportunity to give; so that a deft orator, seeing his jury at fever-heat when he has not yet completed his argument, will close his speaking and take his verdict. People of every creed and no creed meet round the suffering and are nearer to one another and to goodness than at any other time in their lives. Jealousy and bigotry, the most unconquerable of sins, together with every other evil work, are vanquished and held for a time in subjection by compassion and sympathy.

Such conspicuous and undeniable incidents of daily life suggest that one at least of the ends of suffering is not the effect on the sufferer, but on the world; that one at least of the methods of saving the world is

the spectacle of suffering. We can also detect the principle which lies beneath the means and gives their particular application. If sin be indeed the constant and unscrupulous preference of one's self before the interest of every human being, and the consequence of this habitual selfishness an utter and hopeless hardness, then more than half the battle gained will be when the individual is shaken off his self-centre and moved to the service of others. As soon as the lowest nature has forgotten its own desires and even for five minutes has lived for another the grip of sin has been loosened and the work of religion has begun. And it were difficult to name any influence which so swiftly and effectually allures one out of self and so warms the blood with generous emotions as the appeal of Pain.

If Pain be indeed fulfilling this

high purpose, it will be easy to accumulate instances, and the first can be found in our homes. It is a dark dispensation of Providence that a tender and gentle woman, a wife and mother, should be nailed, as it were, to a cross for ten years; but when you turn from this martyr to her household there is light. Her husband, quite a commonplace man once, has been redeemed from coarseness of soul, and has attained to the knowledge of deep mysteries of life; her sons have escaped the unconscious selfishness of youth, and have learned the habit of chivalrous service; her daughters have been deepened in character and have been lifted above a hundred petty foolishnesses by the sight of that martyrdom. Neighbouring households have not suffered, so they are counted fortunate; neither have they such delicate sensibility, such spirit-

ual insight, such ingenuity of sacrifice, such an atmosphere of love, such a depth of peace. For the cross has been set up in this household, and they have lived under its life-giving shadow.

Among the various callings there is one which seems to confer a singular elevation and winsomeness of character. Its members have a firmer hold on the love of the people than any other body of men, and they have won their just and enviable esteem by a habit of unparalleled self-sacrifice. No one serves his fellows at greater cost to himself, or with a more absolute disregard of himself, than a physician. If any one, indeed, has fulfilled the Sermon on the Mount, and exhibited the very spirit of Christ in action, it is this man. Yet how few have been his religious privileges, who is largely cut off from the Word and

Sacrament, who labours while others worship, and is apt to be beset by various trials of faith? Is it not evident that he must enjoy some powerful compensation and that some influence atones to him for what sanctifies others and he has lost? And is it not certain that this fine influence must be the contact with suffering from day to day, till under the necessary composure of his manner and a natural repudiation of sentiment his heart has been shaped to pity and his will to service? They who serve unceasingly before the altar of suffering receive their reward.

This beneficent end of suffering has its chief illustration in the 'Man of Sorrows.' It goes without proving, that no one has ever so affected our Race for weal as our Master, and that the spring of this salvation is in Himself. Partly it is His ex-

ample of holy living, and partly it is His Gospel of Divine Truth, but a white marble Christ had not touched the human heart, nor loosed the bands of sin. It is the Crucified, in the unutterable pathos of His Passion and Death, who has overcome and gotten unto Himself the victory. Because it appears that God also is in the tragedy of life, and in the heart of its mystery. When one enters the dimness of a foreign cathedral, he sees nothing clearly for a while, save that there is a light from the Eastern window, and it is shining over a figure raised high above the choir. As one's eyes grow accustomed to the gloom, he identifies the Crucifix, repeated in every side Chapel, and marks that to this Sufferer all kneel in their trouble, and are comforted. From age to age the shadow hangs heavy on life, and men walk softly in the holy place,

but ever the Crucifix faces them, and they are drawn to His feet and goodness by the invitation of the pierced hands.

Had one lived in Jesus' day and realised His excellence, the Cross would have been an almost insuperable offence to faith. Why should He have had a crown of thorns? Had the veil been lifted from the future, and had one seen the salvation flowing from the five wounds of the Redeemer, then he had been comforted and content. No one then imagined that through the mystery of the Lord's Passion so great a blessing was to come on all ages, for none had entered into the secret of suffering. To-day we are perplexed by the Passion, which is not now concentrated like a bitter essence in the Cup of a Divine Person, but distributed in the earthly vessels of ordinary people, and we stand aghast

at the lot of the victims. Were our vision purged and power given us to detect spiritual effects, then we would understand, and cease to complain. We would see the hard crust of human nature broken up, and the fountains of fine emotion unsealed; the subtle sins which sap the vigour of character eliminated, and the unconscious virtues brought to bloom. Before the widespread, silent, searching appeal of the suffering, each in his appointed place, the heart of the Race grows tender and opens its door to goodness.

This mission of Pain may well be a quick consolation unto them who are its victims. They mourn at times that they are refused a share of the labour of life, and are laid as a burden on their friends. It appears unto those saints in their patience that they are a reduction on the sum-total of life and a daily drain

on human kindness. They make too little of themselves: they do not understand that they are one of the potent forces of salvation. What no ordinary means of Grace has been able to do for members of their household and a circle beyond, they have wrought. From beds of weariness as from a Cross they have done mighty works, and in weakness they have been more eloquent than the voices of preachers in a public place. To-day they are broken in body, so that friends have to lift the cup to their lips; by and by they will slip the body of humiliation, and they will need strong arms in that day to carry their reward. They have gone forth weeping, and sowed their very life in the cold and windy springtime: they will return rejoicing, and they will be bowed down once more, but now beneath the golden burden of their sheaves. With their Lord

they also have seen of the travail of their souls, and are satisfied. By His Grace and in their measure they have filled up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ.

CHAPTER XV

DEATH

Death can be the matter only of a moment, yet it casts its long shadow over a whole life. In death we shall have less to do than in any other affair, yet it is never long absent from our thoughts. No one long ignores this event in his mind; each man takes up his own attitude to the last act. Some accept it as a dark mystery which we cannot pierce, and about which it is vain to speculate, as the Stoic, who in the Roman monuments, holds his wife by the hand and bids her farewell without tears and without hope. Some dread it as an unavoidable catastrophe, which is so far as may be put out of

sight and speech, as that unspeakable Louis in whose presence one mentioned death at his peril, from whose eyes it was hidden by the drapery of foul licence. What the average Christian thinks one can only guess from his tone as he touches on the end, from his habits as he mourns his departed. One fears that his idea of death is as much pagan as Christian, and certainly it seldom rises to the height of faith, as seen in the letters of St. Paul, in which it is counted along with life as one of the Christian's possessions, or in the experience of those triumphant followers of the Lord who wore white as they buried another martyr.

According to the classical idea of St. Paul death was first of all another name for *rest*. For many a long year the apostle had tabernacled in a body of humiliation, which was tortured by disease — a 'thorn in the

flesh ' — and wounded by persecutions, ' the marks of the Lord Jesus.' He was weary with endless and toilsome journeys by land and sea, through cold and heat, ever homeless, sometimes houseless. His labours passed measure, who wrought for his living as a tent-maker and had on his mind the charge of all the churches. His sensitive soul was also sorely tried by the opposition of enemies, by the treachery of friends, by the ingratitude of his converts. From the beginning of his career, onwards as a Pharisee and a Christian, St. Paul is the very type of hard and high living. Into his day he surely packed the maximum of thought and feeling and work and suffering. It was natural that he should feel tired and look kindly towards his release. As a reaper pauses in the heat of the day and imagines his return in the cool of the evening, his heart leaps and he

is glad. Men who have struggled hard and who carry scars do not cling fiercely to life; they are prepared to die as one is ready to sleep. Sleep was one of the apostolic names for death, full of tenderness and peace, but it must not be understood to mean inaction. It is rest from the weariness and harassment of the present life, it is the entrance into the freedom and buoyancy of the life to come.

In the sweetest letter of consolation ever written to a parent on the death of a child, Archbishop Leighton says: 'And is he so quickly laid to rest? Happy he! . . . John is but gone an hour or two sooner to bed, as children used to do, and we are undressing to follow.' Life is a long undressing during which the frailties and faults of our imperfect nature are gradually slipped, and we enter unburdened into the un-

seen world. As the wrinkles are smoothed from the face of a sufferer by the gentle hand of death, so that the war-worn veteran returns to his youth, so the weariness departs from the soul and it enters into the rest for which amid this struggle we often hunger and thirst. St. Paul, and we keep to him as a typical Christian, regarded his death also as a *sacrifice*. As a Jewish worshipper poured forth his drink-offering to God, so one day the saint hoped to take his life in his hand and spill it at God's feet. His life had been one prolonged sacrifice, during which he had given up his home, his friends, his country, his reputation, his church. One thing only remained, his cup of life: this he held also in trust for God, and at the appointed moment he would empty it with joy. His special desire was for the martyr's crown — the

ambition of all the saints — and it was not denied him, for he who for many a year had tasted martyrdom, at last drank his fill of Christ's cup. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that only he who falls by fire or sword offers up his life to God, since sacrifice must depend on the will not on circumstances. When the officers came to take Rutherford, the Scots' saint, before the council and to death, they found him dying, and full of regret that he had missed this honour. 'It was my wish to have glorified God on the scaffold, and I would willingly go with you, but I have received a summons to go where few kings or lords come.' So our brave Scot died on his bed and not in face of the people, but his surrender of himself was a veritable sacrifice. Life is made up of innumerable acts, and each has its own moral com-

plexion. If the motive which inspires be self-will then the colour of life is base and squalid; if devotion to the will of God be the spring of action then is life noble and elevated. And the last and most solemn act in all our life is to die. If as the inevitable will of God appears we repine and rebel, then death will be an act of violence full of indignity and degradation; if we give welcome to the call of God and go out to meet it, then is death the supreme act of homage and obedience. It is the climax of communion between the soul and God.

Unto St. Paul death appeared also as a *gain*, and therein he is comparing it with life. Life is a time of choice, of education, of imperfection, of probation, and allow as we please for the good-will of God and for the Divine grace, there is an element of uncertainty. No vessel

sailing so treacherous a sea is safe till it has reached port and cast anchor. One is delighted by the unexpected recoveries of character in his neighbours; one is cast down by the amazing catastrophes of character. If it be the case, as one believes, that no man is hopeless, one is also driven to the conclusion that no man is sure. Some latent weakness may be developed; some unexpected temptation may be too strong. It becometh every one to be humble and diffident. The unknown possibilities in human nature is a chastening and warning fact which only frivolous and foolhardy people can ignore. No one ever had a more absolute faith in God, none ever followed Christ more closely than St. Paul, and yet he was haunted by the thought that in the end he might be a castaway. It had been an altogether horrible

thing if one who had besought men to believe in Christ, and suffer for Christ, should himself deny the Lord and put Him to open shame; if one who had testified at all times to the excellent glory of the world to come should himself go into darkness. It were, on the other hand, altogether becoming and joyful that St. Paul should come at last to the goal which he saw afar, and receive the crown from his Lord's hands. While he lived this could not be; death was the moment of final victory, for him therefore and every sinful man death was great gain.

And death was above all to such as St. Paul *a meeting with Jesus Christ*, who was the object of his ceaseless faith, the hope of his longing heart. This man did not speculate about heaven — where it was, what it was. Nor did he imagine its glory as became a mystic like St.

John. For him heaven was another name for Christ, the sum of all goodness, the revelation of all perfection. Between him and Christ there had been a long friendship, with many love passages, which had grown more intimate every year but had never been completed. St. Paul had heard Christ's voice on the road to Damascus; he had seen Him in visions; for brief moments he had visited the third heavens; but face to face this great Christian had not set eyes on his Master as had St. Peter and St. John. For an unseen Lord he lived, laboured, suffered as none else has ever done. What wonder that St. Paul hungered and thirsted for the day when that dark servitor death would usher him into the unveiled Presence.

'That one face, far from vanish, rather grows
Or decomposes but to re-compose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows.'

For this representative Christian to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord.

The mystical passion may not rise to this height in ordinary people, but the cloud of death has also for us a silver lining. We have some sense of Christ, and hours when we would go far to see Him in His glory Who has loosed the burden of our sins. With Him are our Departed, waiting for the coming of their friends, so that to die is to meet again our mother. If death veils from our eyes this world in which we have lived, and which to most of us has been on the whole a pleasant world, the same hand will unveil the world to come wherein is contained the reality of those things whereof we have ever dreamed. And if death separates us from those with whom we have lived in peace, we shall be in an in-

stant joined to those who have gone before and who as the years pass become the majority. So heaven grows into Home whereof the door is death.

CHAPTER XVI

OUR DEPARTED

Surely there is no person of human kind who does not wish to believe that those whom we love and have lost awhile are conscious of their friends and are spectators of our lot. It were a peculiar grief to conclude either that we had been blotted out from their memory or that they had no knowledge of our life. When they leave us and their ship disappears in the west, we recognise and bow before the inevitable order of things: we are also fully aware that this ship will not return after a space, and as reasonable people, we do not linger on the quay in vain regrets, but at once set ourselves to duty

with a steadfast heart. It might seem to those not yet initiated into this mystery of sorrow that we had lost little or could forget at will, but this is not the way of the heart. How much the voyagers have taken with them! What a void they have left! Gone from our sight and our affairs, they are enshrined in our memory and more than ever are lords of our love. It were an immense consolation to know that they have us in their hearts, and that although they have passed into the other world, yet from their vantage ground they follow us as we pursue our measured way, and that, if we could see, the distant clouds which overhang us are human faces. Is this only a fond imagination?

If one goes by reason, and God has surely not given us this noble faculty only to deceive, we may well cherish this confidence. It were

incredible that the scissors of death, which evidently cuts off this present life and separates a man from his physical environment, should also cut off his memory and isolate him for ever from his dearest interests. When one crosses the dark ocean and settles on the other side, distance does not obliterate the old world: rather it flings it into relief and endears what is unseen. For the past to be blotted out were to annihilate the person, who could no longer say I after this detachment, but would begin life again as another person. Is it not more reasonable as well as more just that the noble souls who imagined, suffered and died in the cause of God, Patriarchs, Prophets, Martyrs, should see the Day of Christ and the victory of righteousness? And is it not also fitting that a mother who has planned great things for her son and

died before they were fulfilled, should behold the answer to her prayers and be satisfied? This is how it ought to be in a reasonable universe and this therefore we conclude is how it is, unless God intends to put us to confusion.

This conclusion of reason is confirmed by at least one passage in Holy Scripture, and that is an incident in the life of our Lord. As every one must have noticed, Jesus, while in this world, ever suggested another of which He was a native. He was in constant touch with the unseen: He was ever under its influence: He responded to its impressions. Angels ministered to Him; the heavens opened above His head: voices were heard calling Him the Beloved Son of God. If ever the veil between the worlds should be lifted it would be through Him the Chief Saint of Religion and the

Sent One of God, the visible link between the worlds. What was to be expected happened in the Transfiguration, when the Lord passed for a brief space into the spiritual sphere and two inhabitants of that sphere came unto the very confines of the physical. One was the Lawgiver of Israel who made a nation of the Hebrews, the other the most typical of all the prophets who sustained that nationality. Two living personages they stood with Jesus, and their conversation had to do not with heaven but with earth, not with their present but with their past. As in their day they had thought and toiled only for God's kingdom, and had departed before the day of its glory, so all the ages had those patient saints watched its growth and longed for its completion. They spake with Jesus of the Exodus He should accomplish at Jerusalem. If

the two Jewish leaders were still intent on their life-work it may be taken for granted that in their measure others will still pursue the high ends of their past and that certainly not one who has had a friend on earth will forget him yonder.

No doubt this belief collides rudely with a certain idea of conventional piety that a person admitted into Heaven will be so absorbed in the contemplation of God, or the celebration of His praise or the enjoyment of his own high estate — it may be put one way or another — that he will be removed far above former ties and earthly considerations. Which sounds plausible and seems beautiful, but if you look into it is not Christian or religious. Suppose that the head of a household fighting with his family the hard battle of life and enduring many trials, should emigrate to the new world and there

come into great affluence. Would not his first thought, so far as he was a true-hearted man, be of the patient wife and clinging children he had left, and if through any hindrance of circumstances he could not at once share with them his felicity, would he not pursue them with his thoughts and prayers? What piety is that which rests on disloyalty? Is not love the surest evidence of communion with God? Various heavens have been imagined which do not attract or elevate, but one of sheer selfishness is surely the worst.

It may, however, be very fairly urged that if the Departed live in constant sympathy with us in our lower place they must come short of Heaven. If they see our trials and agonies, our afflictions and sorrows, our temptations and sins, or even our failings and weaknesses, to say nothing of our physical dangers and pains,

must they not miss the safety and joy of heaven? Were it left to our decision, would we not choose rather that our friends should be cut off from all knowledge of us by the thick veil of oblivion than that from their splendid distance and in their high helplessness they should see and suffer? But are we not too apt to conclude that peace and suffering are inconsistent? Has the Eternal been secluded from all knowledge of human life during those ages? Has not the cry of the miserable been ever in His ears? has not His heart been melted within Him? Was it not on this account that He sent His Son and endured His dying prayer? Did not Christ rise from the dead and sit down on the right hand of the Divine Majesty, and yet does He not share in all the labours and pains of His disciples? Pity and sympathy are not the contradiction of

spiritual joy: they are two of its elements.

We must remind ourselves that the Departed will regard life with other eyes than ours. From our lower standpoint, still in the mists of the valley, suffering seems an unmixed calamity, and we had made a world without the possibility of pain or sin. With their clear vision looking from the heights they will not make moan over this Gethsemane with its bitter cryings and bloody sweat. What even we dimly feel to be a good in the midst of our conflict, is to them a perfect and triumphant principle, because they behold the end of all things. They see life whole, not only Abraham's exile, but also Abraham's portion: not only St. Stephen's stones, but also St. Stephen's crown: not only St. Paul's long martyrdom, but also St. Paul's unspeakable reward. From their

vantage ground they see the son in the misery of the far country, and again at home a better son. When we are under the sharp knife, they will not complain of Providence, nor be in despair of us, for already we are again healed and strong. Children pity themselves at school, because of the toil and discipline, we of older age envy them and wish we were again at school, that by our patience we might earn richer possessions. If in this world St. Paul gloried in his afflictions anticipating their peaceable fruits, is he likely to weep over another sinner who agonises to obtain his crown?

The conviction that the Departed are not dead, or unconscious, or indifferent to us, their poor relations, but are alive for evermore, full of activity and constantly mindful of us — what may be called the sense of the Departed — has various excellent

effects. For one thing it invests the unseen world with reality, so that we are not repelled by the thought of an unknown inhospitable foreign shore. Gradually, as we look across, the shadows take form and grow familiar; we recognise those whom we remember and would wish to see again. They are living there as they did in our homes, they are thinking of us as of old; they are ready to give us welcome; they will have much to tell us. And this faith can alone deliver us from vain regrets; for who has lost a friend and in the hour of reflection has been satisfied with himself? Wherein the Departed failed you is forgotten, wherein you failed the Departed is bitterly remembered. Too late, alas, one cannot now ask pardon. If the Departed only could see the tears which have at last burst the barriers of pride, if they only knew the reparation one

was making for their sake! Are they denied one of the chief satisfactions of the soul — that those whom we love are not unworthy? If there be joy in the presence of God's angels over the penitent, is there no share for his mother, whose prayers have at last been answered? It is a pity one cannot get a receipt for the debt he has paid, but let him be sure that it is cancelled.

And in the witness of the Departed is one of the strong encouragements of life. We need not fear that they will regard us with critical and censorious eyes as we toil and strive; sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing in this sore conflict. They have been of like passions with ourselves: theirs also are now the infinite pity and charity of God. They continually believe in us as does our Lord Christ: they expect noble deeds and holy living of us:

they beseech God continually on our behalf. If there be none left on earth to bid us good cheer and sustain our hearts, there be many on the other side, and as we run our ordered course, the Departed lean forward from their high places and stretch out their hands, rejoicing as we slip each weight, and forsake each sin, full of longing till we also reach the goal, and receive the Crown.